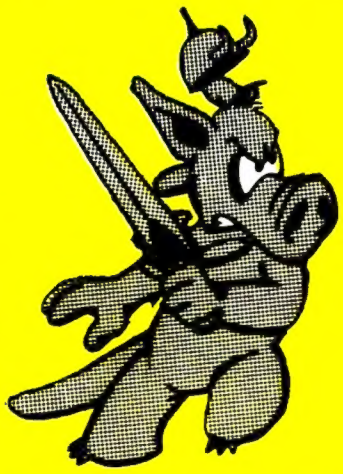
# BEM

BRITAIN'S COMICS NEWS FANZINE

50p

## LONDON'S COMICON 1981: DETAILS



## CEREBUS APPRECIATED

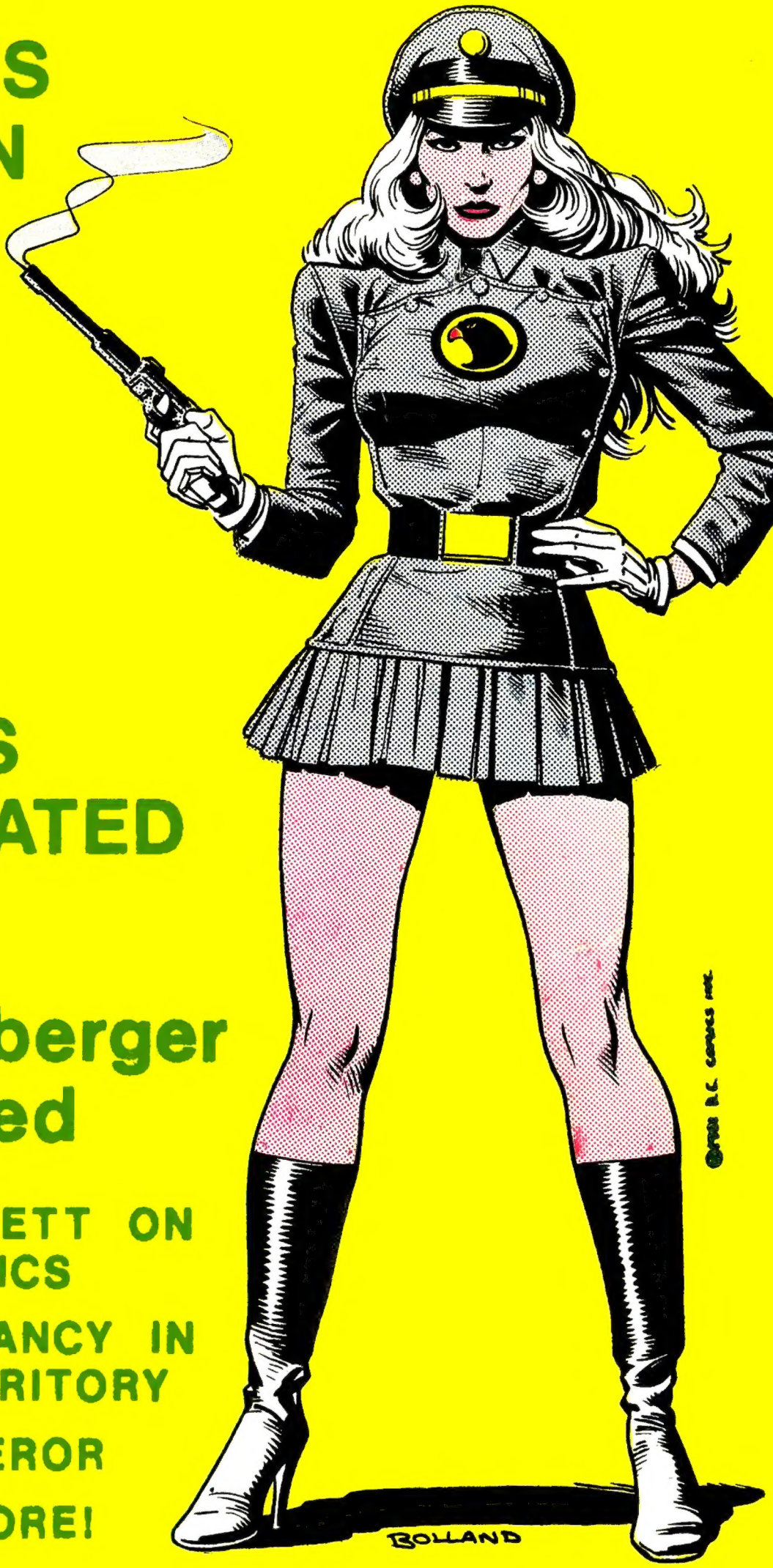
## Kurt Schaffenberger interviewed

GRAEME BASSETT ON SPIES IN COMICS

KATHLEEN GLANCY IN HEMBECK TERRITORY

H.M.S. CONQUEROR

AND LOTS MORE!



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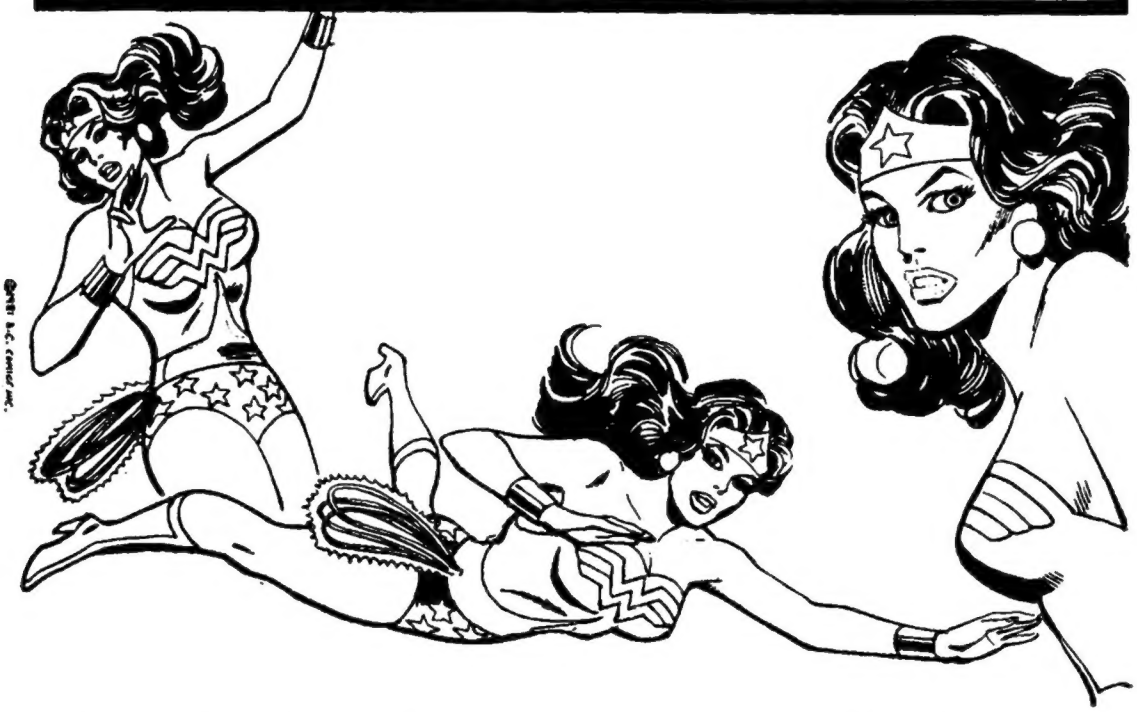
BEM-34 -- JULY 1981

# THE BEM NEWS SERVICE



Above is part of the model sheet for the "new look" Wonder Woman, by José Delbo & Dick Giordano. To go with the revised costume, her book will get a new creative team: Roy Thomas (who therefore is leaving the Legion of Super-Heroes) & Gene Colan. They begin with a special 16-page insert in DC COMICS PRESENTS #41, and continue with a full-length story in WONDER WOMAN #288. The previous issue, #287, contains a special Wonder Woman/Teen Titans insert, by Marv Wolfman, Don Heck & Romeo Tanghal.

Gene Colan is drawing the PHANTOM ZONE mini-series, which will now run to four issues, scripted by Steve Gerber. He has also done the first episode of a Conway-scripted Zatanna series for WORLD'S FINEST #274; this will alternate with a Plastic Man feature by Martin Pasko, Joe Staton & Bob Smith which starts in #273. Gene will also be pencilling BATMAN; he's done #340, and then, after two issues by Irv Novick, takes over again with #343. He may also guest-pencil DETECTIVE occasionally.

Starting with the October cover-dated issues, all 32-page DC comics are going up from 50 to 60 cents. However, DC are adding two more story pages, so that DC remain a slightly better buy per page than Marvel. The text page remains, plus four pages of ads (plus covers); the digest and dollar comics remain unchanged. Note the "20p" and "30p" prices printed on the November 60c and dollar covers...

Another 16-page insert is to appear in TEEN TITANS #16, heralding a new monthly title from editor Dick Giordano that Roy Thomas & Gerry Conway are developing. It will feature a super-hero group of funny animals. No art team has yet been named.

Marv Wolfman is leaving "Dial 'H' For Hero" after ADVENTURE #486; he is being replaced by E. Nelson Bridwell and Bob Rozakis, while George Kashdan has also scripted a pair of fill-in stories. On the artistic side, Don Heck, Trevor Von Eeden, and Carmine Infantino have all completed stories for the book.

Mike Grell has requested a six-month leave of absence from drawing WARLORD, to work on STAR-SLAYER--of which more later! He will, however, continue to script the feature (after a reprint of #1 in #51), with art in his style being done by Mark Texiera & Mike DeCarlo, starting with #52. Laurie Sutton takes over from Ross Andru (freeing him for several projects, including an unspecified new title) as editor with #52; a new back-up feature will run from #51 to #54, "Dragonsword", by Paul Levitz & Tom Yeates. The hero is an apprentice knight, who wields a sword endowed with the soul of a dragon against an evil emperor controlling his land. Accompanying him is his squire, an intelligent monkey...

Paul Levitz takes over as scripter of the LSH with #285. #281 will be drawn by Steve Ditko from a Roy Thomas plot, dialogued by Paul, and inked by Bruce Patterson. Pat Broderick guest-pencils #283 over a Levitz story, and #284 is a guest-stint by Howard Bender, in a Roy Thomas tale that features Wildfire.

BEST OF DC DIGEST #18 stars the Teen Titans. It features a new 10-page story by Marv Wolfman, Carmine Infantino & Romeo Tanghal, which guest-stars Speedy and Aqualad; the reprints are from TEEN TITANS #20, #21, #22 (plotted by Len Wein & Marv Wolfman, dialogued & pencilled by Neal Adams, and inked by Nick Cardy), & #24 (by Bob Haney, Gil Kane, and Nick Cardy). George Perez did the cover. DC SPECIAL DIGEST #16, a month later, spotlights Green Lantern, reprinting the stories scripted by Denny O'Neil and pencilled by Neal Adams from GL #81, #82, & #84, and FLASH 217-219. Dick Giordano inked four of them, but #84 was inked by Berni Wrightson, and #219 by Neal himself. And DC SPECIAL DIGEST #17, with the theme of GHOSTS, is worth seeking out; of the 12 stories, four are pencilled by Adams, who also inks a Buckler story; also present are Berni Wrightson, Mike Kaluta, Joe Orlando (who inks one of the Adams tales), and Wally Wood.

Pat Broderick takes over pencilling Firestorm for his last two appearances in FLASH, in #303 and #304. FLASH #305 is a full-length teaming of Barry Allen and Jay Garrick, as they try to avoid Earth-I history repeating itself on Earth-II and making Jay also a widower. In FLASH #306 the new back-up strip begins, with Doctor Fate, set in 1981 and written by Martin Pasko.

The Adam Strange back-up in GREEN LANTERN is to end in #146, replaced by "Tales of the Green Lantern Corps", written by Paul Kupperberg. And a new JONAH HEX back-up begins in #53, created by Dan Mishkin and Gary Cohn and drawn by Tom Yeates: "Tejano", the story of a Mexican/Indian half-breed Texas Ranger.

The fourth DC-Marvel team-up tabloid has had a slight change of line-up. The X-Men will now encounter not the Legion of Super-Heroes, but the new Teen Titans. Expect it next year.

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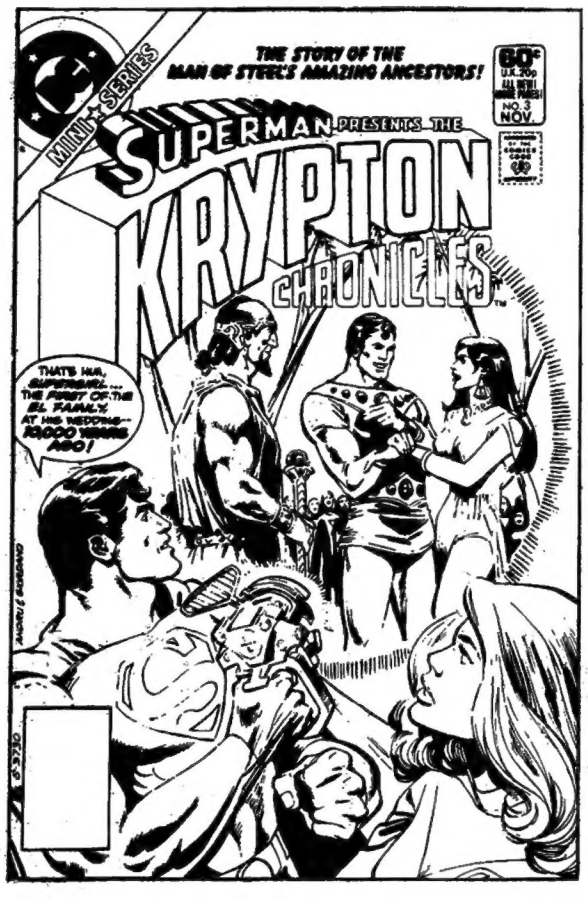
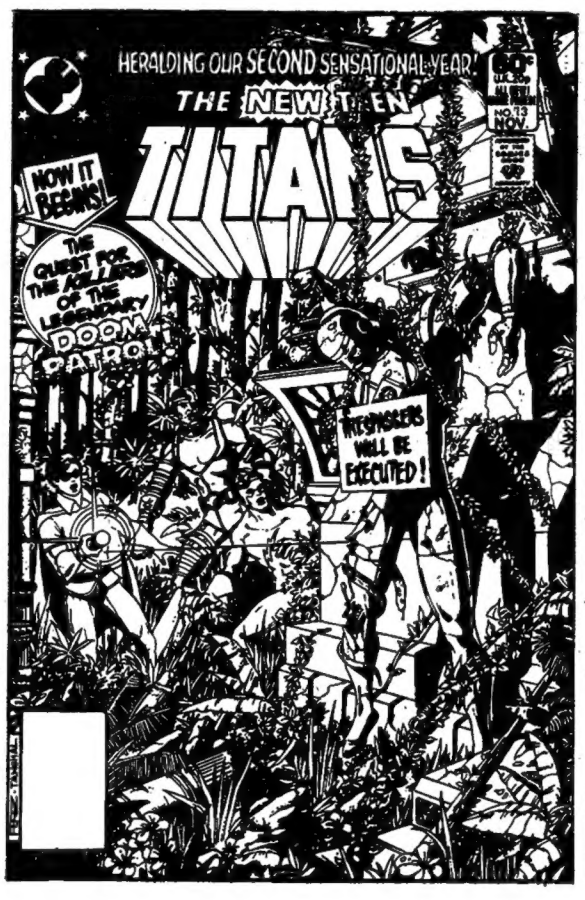
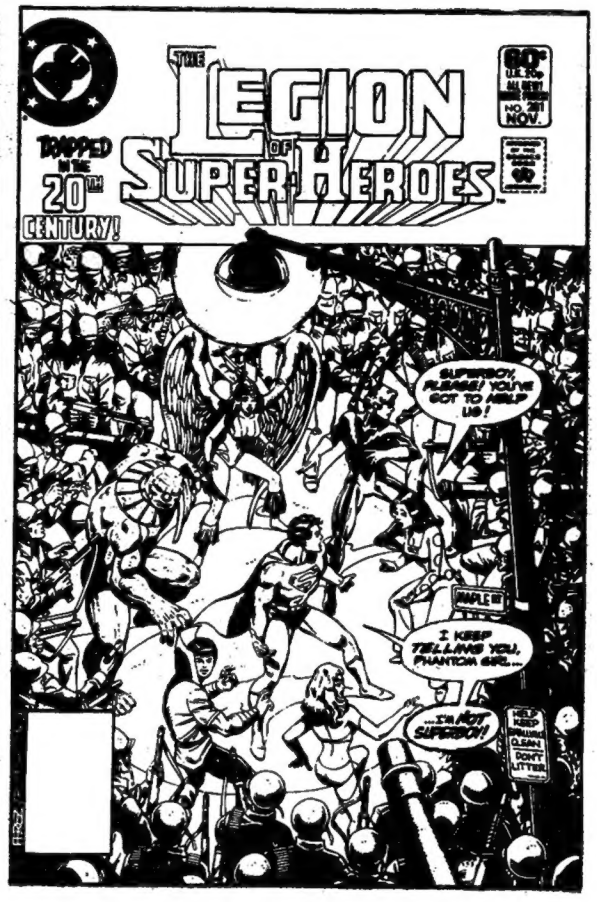
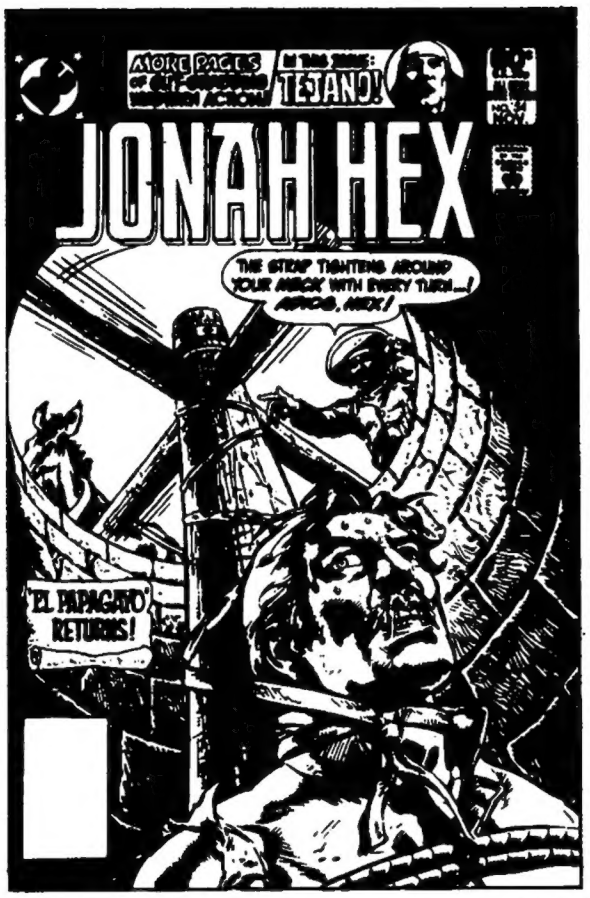




HERALDING OUR SECOND SENSATIONAL YEAR!
THE NEW TEEN TITANS
NOW IT BEGINS!
THE QUEST FOR THE KILLERS OF THE LEGENDARY DOOM PATROL!
TRESPASSERS WILL BE EXECUTED!
60¢
NO. 15 NOV.



★ 5 ALL NEW STORIES ★
★SUPERGIRL ★ LOIS LANE ★ JIMMY OLSEN
★ MR. AND MRS. SUPERMAN ★ CLARK KENT
NOVEMBER
NO 212
THE SUPERMAN FAMILY
SUPERGIRL BATTLES THE VIKING VILLAIN BLACKROCK!
WHO IS THE SUPERGIRL VISITING MR. & MRS. CLARK KENT?
CLARK KENT
LOIS LANE
JIMMY OLSEN


MORE PAGES OF ALL-SUPERHERO ACTION!
AS THIS ISSUE: TEJANO!
JONAH HEX
THE STRAP TIGHTENS AROUND YOUR NECK WITH EVERY TURN...! ARGGS, HEX!
'EL PAPAGAYO' RETURNS!

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Joe Staton is scheduled to ink several Curt Swan-pencilled SUPERMAN stories. Romeo Tanghal will ink JLA ≠196, over pencils by George Perez, while in TEEN TITANS ≠13 the quest for the killers of the original Doom Patrol begins, with Robotman, back in his old familiar robot body, as guest-star.

Bruce Jones takes over the scripting of "I, Vampire", starting with HOUSE OF MYSTERY ≠299. Tom Sutton remains as regular artist.

Upcoming in BRAVE & BOLD: Batman and Robin of Earth-Two, with guest-star Starman, by Alan Brennert (≠182); Hawkman, by Mishkin & Cohn (≠183); the Riddler, by Don Krarr (≠184); and Adam Strange, by Mike Barr (≠185). The art on all these is by Jim Aparo.

And in DC COMICS PRESENTS: Superman and Flash, by Pasko & Heck (≠38); Plastic Man, by Pasko, Staton & Smith (≠39); Metamorpho, by Conway, Novick & McLaughlin (≠40); the Joker, by Pasko & Garcia Lopez (≠41); Power Girl, scripted by Marv Wolfman (≠42); and the Golden Age Superman, also by Wolfman.

Jack Adler has been promoted to DC Comics Vice President/Production Manager, with Bob Rozakis taking charge of day-to-day operations as Production Manager.

Joe Kubert has received a Reuben Award for his work on SERGEANT ROCK.

Pat Broderick has left Marvel for DC; he was told to redraw certain sequences in an issue of MICRONAUTS, but declined to do so. As Bill Mantlo has apparently lost interest in the book, Jim Shooter apparently almost cancelled it -- instead, due to the strong direct sales support for the series, with MICRONAUTS ≠38 it will become a 32-page, no ads, 75 cent comic, distributed only via the direct sales network of specialist comic shops, etc.

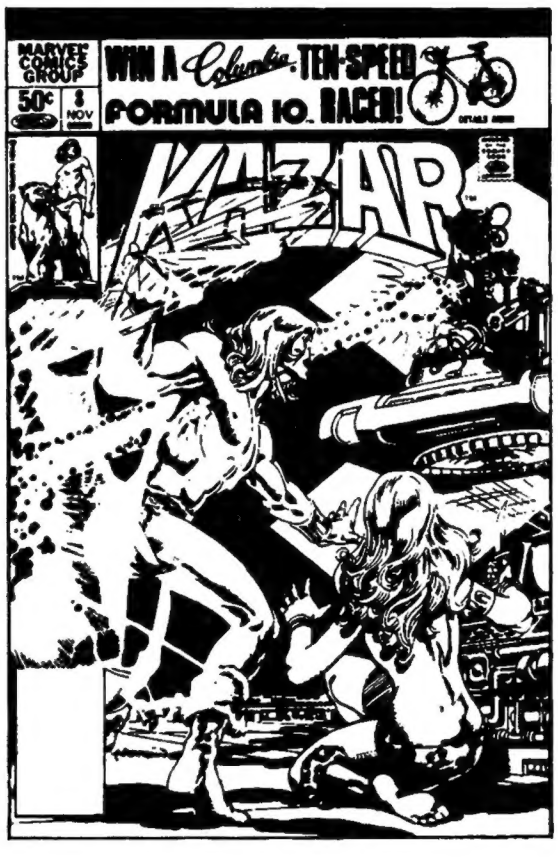
BIZARRE ADVENTURES ≠28 is no longer to be a Red Sonja issue, by Chris Claremont & John Bolton; Marvel no longer have the rights to the character. The book is now about Mirada, known as the She Wolf, a citizen of Rome in the first century who "battles foes who never got into the history books, because historians were scared to write about them" --says Denny O'Neil. John Bolton is having to change the heroine's costume in some flashback sequences; she had already been given a new costume in the main part of the story, as the loss of the rights to Sonja was always a possibility. John mentions that he'll soon have some pages of his recent Kull story for sale, by the way...

HOWARD THE DUCK ≠32, the first revived colour issue, is due out in September.

There is plenty of rôle-swapping these days: Mike Zeck has become the regular CAPTAIN AMERICA artist, leaving his former chore to his former inker, Gene Day, who becomes regular penciller-inker of MASTER OF KUNG FU. And with John Buscema doing special projects of all kinds, his place as artist on the colour CONAN comic will be taken by Gil Kane.

Alan Weiss is doing at least a couple of the AVENGERS issues coming up, one of which should guest-star The Silver Surfer. Alan Kupperberg is the other regular AVENGERS artist at the moment.

As well as the special dollar issue of FANTASTIC FOUR, ≠236, Marvel are preparing a 32-page, no ads special comic to be sold through direct sales outlets only. It will be scripted and laid out by Fred Hembeck, and involve the "Hembeck Man" in a strange American custom called a "roast", in which the FF are guests at a party held in their honour by the other Marvel heroes, who make speeches, etc. The regular Marvel artists will finish and ink their own characters; the idea was Jim Shooter's, and he helped with the plotting. While the heroes will stay in character, you are advised not to treat it as in Marvel Universe continuity.



STOP PRESS: Starting with the January 1982 cover-dates, KA-ZAR and MOON KNIGHT (≠10 & ≠15) will be sold via direct sales outlets only, with 32 pages of comics & features, and no ads, for 75 cents.

THIS IS HOW IT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THE STAR WORLDS COME TO EARTH!!!
DON'T LOOK FOR GODS OR GURUS OR BENEVOLENT GIFT GIVERS··· PREPARE TO MEET--
CAPTAIN VICTORY
AND HIS GALACTIC RANGERS!!
IF OUR VAST UNIVERSE SPAWNS AN INFINITE VARIETY OF PLANETS AND MEN···IT MUST ALSO BREED SPECIAL DANGERS WHICH ONLY A FORCE UNIQUE IN PURPOSE AND METHOD CAN DEAL WITH···
WHERE THIS FORCE ARRIVES, A SAGA BEGINS!!
YOU HEARD MY ORDER! I WANT ANOTHER COMPUTER CHECK ON THE POS-T-ON OF THIS SOLAR SYSTEM!
WHAT WE'RE LOOKING AT MAY BE A SERIOUS BREACH OF GALACTIC LAW!
©1981 JACK KIRBY INC.
CREATED, WRITTEN AND DRAWN BY: JACK KIRBY
LETTERED AND INKED BY: MIKE ROYER
COLORIST: STEVE OLIFF

IRON MAN #151 guest-stars Ant-Man, with #152 & #153 resolving the Bethany Cabe plot-line. Bob Layton is leaving the book with #154, for other projects--including writing & drawing a 3-issue HERCULES tryout.

There are at least 3 mini-series on tap. The first will probably be HAWKEYE, scripted by Mark Gruenwald... there will also be a try-out for SCARLET WITCH and THE VISION, with personnel yet to be assigned. The third series features what sounds like a funny animal (though you never can tell), ROCKY RACCOON. Bill Mantlo will write it. -TCR

Ed Hannigan, who last worked as writer of THE DEFENDERS, is going to be the regular artist for PETER PARKER. Before that happens however fill-in issues by Bob Hall and Gil Kane will appear. This year's PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL will be pencilled by two different pencillers: Alan Weiss and James Sherman. -TCR

Pacific Comics, who release the Schanes & Schanes portfolios, are branching out into comics. The first two bi-monthly titles are Jack Kirby's CAPTAIN VICTORY, due out in July, and Mike Grell's STARSLAYER, which is scheduled for August release. They will be sold only through direct sales outlets, like DAZZLER #1; CAPTAIN VICTORY has 32 pages + coated, glossy covers, with 25 pages of 4-colour story plus special features for one dollar. It will be printed at Sparta.

2000AD prog 219 has a cover of Judge Dredd by Colin Wilson. Inside is episode 17 (of 19) of the Strontium Dog "Portrait of a Mutant" story, episode 42 (of 50) of the Meltdown Man, the second episode of the re-started "Mean Arena" series by Tom Tully & Steve Dillon, the second half of a "Mega-Rackets" Judge Dredd story drawn by Colin, and a Future Shock by Alan Moore and Garry Leach.

Prog 220 has a Strontium Dog cover by Carlos Ezquerra. Another two-part "Mega-Rackets" tale begins for Judge Dredd, "The Stookie Glanders", written by T.B. Grover and drawn by Emberton; this involves the slaughter of an alien race for a special gland they have, which reputedly gives immortality. The Future Shock is by Steve Moore and Casanovas.

Prog 221 has a Dredd cover, drawn by Ian Gibson. Inside is the conclusion of the Strontium Dog story, which comes out of its extended flashback for the final confrontation between Johnny Alpha and his dear old dad. The Future Shock is by Steve Moore and Johnny Johnson, who has previously drawn some "Return to Armageddon" covers and the "Mean Arena" strip in prog 202. Before, he's been asked to copy other artists' styles; this time, he has been allowed to draw like himself!

In prog 222, the "Nemesis the Warlock" series begins, scripted by Pat Mills and drawn by Kev O'Neill -- the cover ties in with this. Strontium Dog begins a 2-week break, replaced by "Tharg's Nightmare" by Alan Grant & Ian Gibson. There's a 1½-page Future Shock by Kelvin Gosnell and Colin Wilson, and Judge Dredd starts another 2-part story, which ties up all the "Mega-Rackets" thus far exposed: "Mob Wars" is the title, as aliens arrive to take over all of Mega-City One's rackets. The Mophio Trading Company is the 'front' that they use--hence they're called "Mophioso". The art is by Ron Smith.

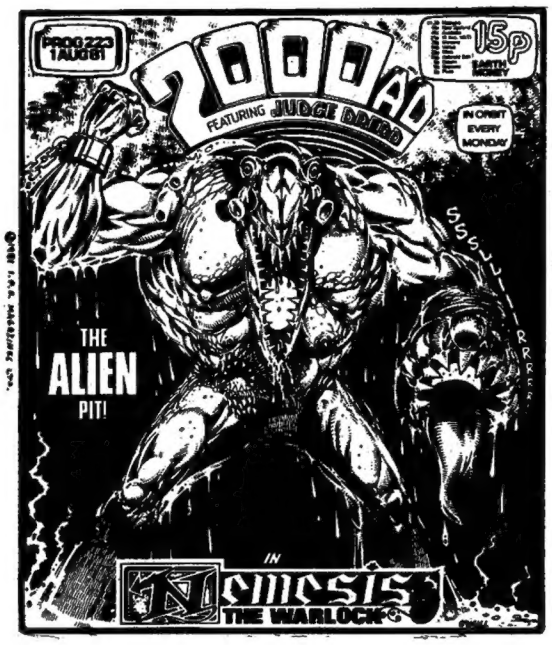
Prog 223 also has a Nemesis cover by Kev O'Neill; "Tharg's Nightmare" and "Mob Wars" conclude.

And prog 224 brings an increase in cover price to 16p, after 31 issues at 15p. The good news is that it has a Brian Bolland cover to announce that "Judge Death Lives" --this story will run for five weeks, and all the art is by Brian. Strontium Dog returns with "The Gronk Affair", a 4-part story; and, in the third episode of the Nemesis story, the title character at last makes an appearance.

The Meltdown Man story ends in prog 227, and is replaced the following week by the new future war series, set a thousand years in the future on a war planet -- so it's more land-based than the VC's were, though they may zip up into space once or twice. It's created and written by Gerry Finley-Day, with input from editor Steve McManus and artist Dave Gibbons. Dave has drawn the first few episodes, and hopes to continue if time, and his other work commitments, permit him to.

Mike McMahon is working on a new multi-part Judge Dredd serial, due to start in prog 229. This will be "a major new direction", it seems, and will affect Dredd for at least a year. Intriguing, eh?

BATTLE-ACTION's circulation has dropped --unless sales increase, aided by recent free gifts, it could be cancelled. If it is, it would probably merge into 2000AD...




# comicon '81

ComiCon '81 will be held on October 31st and November 1st, at the Regent Centre Hotel in Carburton Street, London WC2. There will be four main rooms, opening off the self-contained foyer which will include a bar, reasonably-priced soft drinks & sandwiches, toilets, and registration. One room will show over 20 hours of films, all relevant for a comics convention; it will seat 300, as will the main talks room. The dealers' room is limited to 40 tables, with a wide range of material; and room 4 will contain the art exhibition (from Alex Raymond up to 1981), and also be used for an alternative series of talks. There should always be two events happening, and the dealers' room is to be open for about 16 hours over the two days--expect talks, panels, and quizzes!

Admission will cost £5 a head; for those most interested in the panels, for an extra £1 you get a different coloured badge, which allows you to sit in the front few rows. And another optional extra is about £7 for the Saturday evening banquet, at which the 1980 Eagle Awards (and probably the SSI's awards) will be presented; but if you prefer a few sandwiches, the films will be in progress a couple of halls away.

In keeping with the organizers' motto, "With the fan in mind", no big advertising campaign is being conducted; attendance will be limited. You are therefore urged to send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Frank Dobson, ComiCon '81, 3 Lewisham Way, London SE14 6PP. You'll be sent the next mailing report, including details of how to book. A special room rate has been negotiated at the hotel for con attendees.

Dez Skinn, co-organizer with Frank, says that they're trying to return to the days when cons were by fans, for fans -- hence the limitation on the number of dealers, and fans, attending. There will be a table for the sale of fanzines (so bring them along, fan-eds; if in doubt, seek me out! There will be a small charge, though...); a lot of British artists and writers will be there, and it's hoped that the Society of Strip Illustration will take an active part in the proceedings of the weekend.

All in all, it should be a good weekend, without the overcrowding and reliance on star American names of some recent years. I'll certainly be there! -Martin Lock

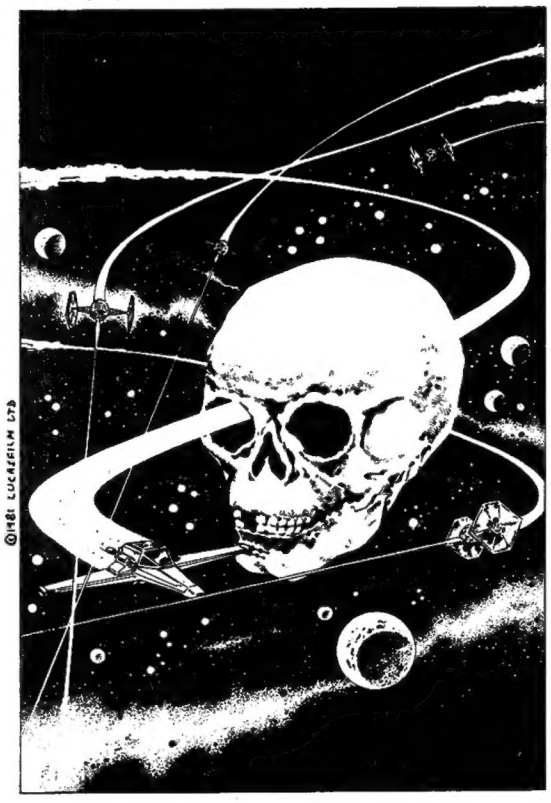
A new monthly Captain Britain strip, scripted by Dave Thorpe and drawn by Alan Davis, begins in MARVEL SUPER-HEROES 377; see the example at bottom right. The first episode runs to 5 pages.

MARVEL ACTION ≠15 is the final issue; the title merges into CAPTAIN AMERICA with ≠21. Depending on sales reports, MARVEL SUPER ADVENTURE may merge into SPIDER-MAN & HULK. The first monthly issue of FUTURE TENSE, with 52 pages for 40p, is ≠36.

The 39-page Goodwin/Williamson/Palmer/Simonson story from the American STAR WARS ≠50 is being used in this year's EMPIRE STRIKES BACK ANNUAL, and the stories in ≠54 & ≠55 are ones already printed here. This leaves a shortage of material for the British monthly, so two original 15-page stories have been commissioned by Marvel UK, for issues 149 & 150. The scripts are by Steve Moore, with art (including the splash page below) by Adolfo Buylla, a Spanish artist.

SPIDER-MAN & HULK will be re-launched in September, with a Spider-Man mask as a free gift.

Two new 40-page monthlies are due from Marvel this autumn: BLAKE'S 7 and WORZEL GUMMIDGE. To tie in with the re-starting of their TV series, they will debut in September and October respectively. Both magazines, similar in concept to the DR WHO monthly, are being packaged "out of house" by Stuart Wales. The centre-spreads will be in colour; the art for Avon, Vila and friends will be by Ian Kennedy for the first 7 or 8 issues. The cover price is to be 40 or 45 pence. Talking of DR WHO, "The Dalek Tapes" will be reprinted in colour, one 1-page instalment per issue, on the back cover.



A report was published in the May 8th CTN (a trade paper for confectioners, tobacconists, & newsagents) saying that Marvel Britain will soon be taking over the production of Spider-Man and Fantastic Four material for Europe, including Britain, on behalf of Marvel in America. Things aren't yet quite as definite as this report implies; however, samples of British-produced material have been produced and taken to New York, so there's a good chance that Marvel Britain's output of original superhero material should increase drastically in coming months. Even if Marvel in the States don't want to use this material, by Alan Davis, Mick Austin, and Adolfo Buylla, it should still appear in Europe; Paul Neary is pleased with its quality, and certainly wants to continue to work with the people involved.

The adaptation of "The Time Bandits" (see left) is being drawn by David Lloyd & John Stokes. It will run to 48 pages, the standard length for a MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL in America; Paul hopes to publish it as a Marvel special in this country too, if it can be timed to coincide with the film's British release.

STARBURST ≠35 is the first issue with eight extra pages of colour, 2 of which are to be devoted to "Tales of the Rim", the new full-colour strip written & drawn by Paul Neary; it is also the first to cost 70p. The following issue has a change of size, as STARBURST gains an extra inch in height to go A4 (like Bem). The films featured include "Escape From New York", "The Howling", "Them", and "Caveman", while John Baxter interviews Buster Crabbe, and Tony Crawley writes on the recent "Star Wars" radio series.

Two Specials are due out on July 30th; one is a STARBURST POSTER SPECIAL, which unfolds into something striking. The other reprints the MERLIN story, drawn by John Buscema, from MARVEL PREVIEW ≠22; it has 52 pages for 50p.

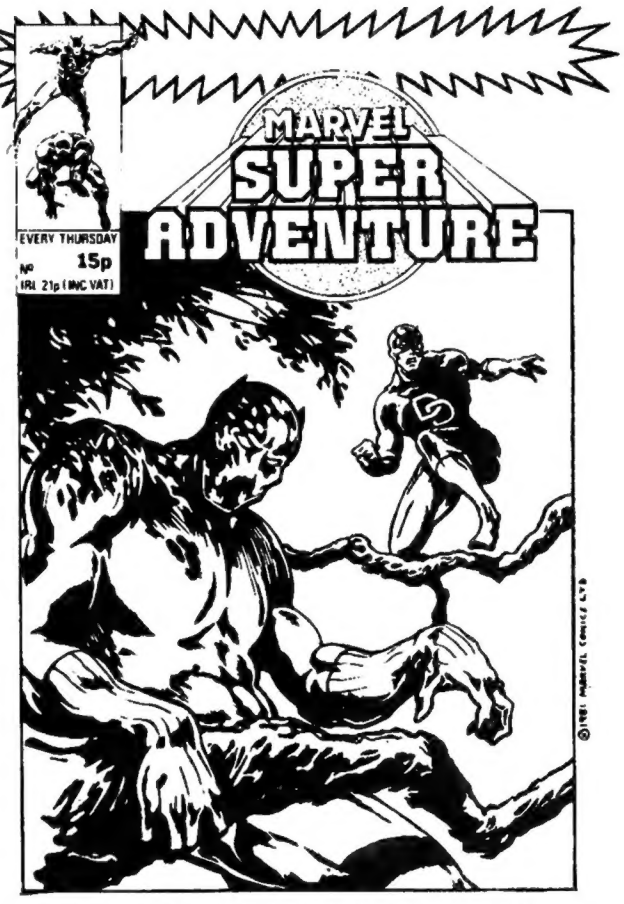
Six Winter Specials are planned, with 52 pages for 45p: SPIDER-MAN, SPIDER-MAN PUZZLE BOOK, FANTASTIC FOUR, X-MEN, DOCTOR WHO, and a WEREWOLF one with a John Bolton cover. There is a possibility that WESTERN GUNFIGHTERS may become a regular monthly title. None of the current full-size Marvel monthlies are in danger of cancellation now, though it seems possible that one or two of the pocket book line may be merged into others--to make room later this year for CLASSICS POCKET BOOKS, which will reprint selected MARVEL CLASSICS COMICS, such as "A Christmas Carol".

168 Annuals are due out this summer, from 13 different publishers. Fleetway (IPC) have 54 titles, ranging from £1.95 to £2.75, and including JUDGE DREDD (similar to last year's volume, with 30 new pages of Dredd in colour by Mike McMahon, who also drew the cover) at £2.50, STARLORD (which includes a Strontium Dog story in colour, scripted by Steve McManus and drawn by Carlos Ezquerra) at £2.25, and 2000AD (with a cover and 8-page colour Dredd strip by Brain Bolland, a colour Tharg story drawn by Robin Smith, a Future Shock drawn by Colin Wilson, and Steve Dillon on Ro-Busters, plus reprints of early Mach-1, Dredd, and Flesh strips), ACTION, BATTLE, and LION, all at £1.95. New this year are annuals for PHOTO SECRET LOVE, LAFF-A-LYMPICS, GRANGE HILL, and the recently revived GIRL.

IPC do not allow material under 4 years old to be reprinted in their annuals, so this is the first time that early stories from 2000AD have been available; it means that the 2000AD ANNUAL is all 2000AD material.

Stafford Pemberton's 29 titles include ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL, BATMAN, SUPERMAN, BUCK ROGERS, MAGNUM P.I., WONDER WOMAN, METAL MICKEY, POPEYE, and SMUGGLER, at £2.50, plus at £1.95 THE SMURFS and DC: THE SUPER HEROES. The cheapest titles are among D.C. Thomson's 25, which range from £1.25 to £1.70, including HOTSPUR, VICTOR, WARLORD, and SCOOP.

Grandreams and World International have 21 titles each. The latter's titles include DR WHO, CHiPs, and SCOOBY DOO at £2.25, while all the Grandreams cost the same. They include DALLAS, THE DUKES OF HAZZARD, THE HULK, STAR WARS -- THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, SPIDER-MAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE MUPPETS, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, STARBURST, WORZEL GUMMIDGE, X-MEN, LARRY THE LAMB, PLAY AWAY, STORIES FROM THE BIBLE, BARBARA WOODHOUSE, HEIDI, and SHERLOCK HOLMES -- all at £2.25 each.




Titan Books, the publishing arm of Titan Distributors, are releasing "The Chronicles of Judge Dredd" in July, by John Wagner & Brian Bolland. It reprints almost all of Brian's non-serial work in Dredd from 1978 to 1980, plus a 4-page "Walter the Wobot" story. The album has a new cover of Dredd and Judge Death by Brian; it runs to 64 pages, softcover, for £2.95, with a page size of 280 x 220mm. Look for it in the specialist comic shops, or by post from the Forbidden Planet Mail Order people, etc.

Canada's CAPTAIN CANUCK has ended; the final issue was ≠14. However, the Captain's original creator, Richard Comely, is back in business with STAR RIDER AND THE PEACE MACHINE, a 48-page $1.25 black & white comic involving time-travel back to out time to prevent World War III, published by Comely And Comely. And another company is planning a range of 50 cent comics: ALI BABA (sword & sorcery à la Arabian Nights), THE NORTHERN LIGHT (a superhero seen in ORB MAGAZINE a few years ago), and THUNDER TRIPLE FEATURE. The publishers are Thunder Comics, and the editor is Jim Wiley.

CEREBUS has been delayed by changes both of printer and distributor. Dave Sim is to design a pack of cards for playing the noble game of Diamondback--watch for it soon! -ML

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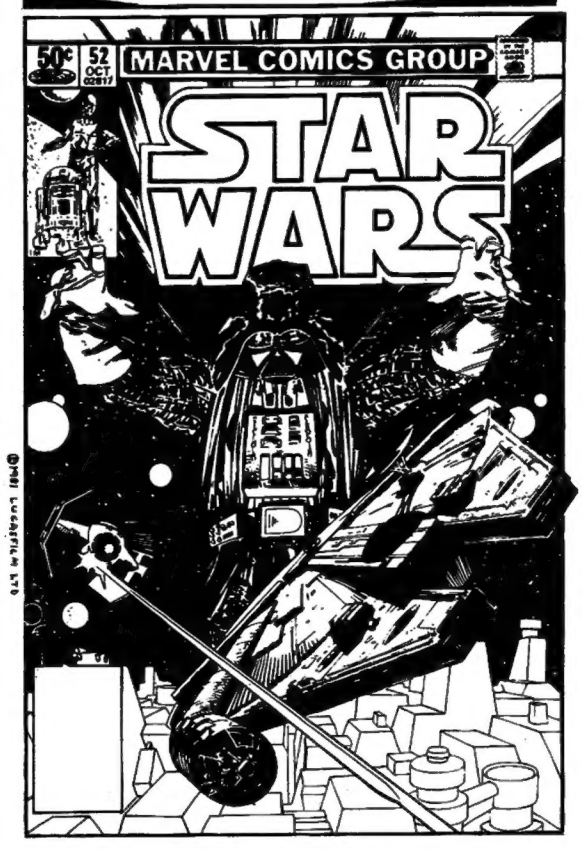


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# NEWS AT BEM

There should be more reading in this issue of Bem than ever before. Our new-found flexibility in print size means that some pages have up to 20% more reading than in recent issues -- this includes Reaction. I hope that the increasing clarity of the printing here more than makes up for the slightly smaller type.

Sacrificing our review section this time has given more room for articles; not a lot of room, true, but it all helps. I'm reluctant to go beyond 44 pages on a regular basis, as that would mean a price rise, and 50p is a very convenient price. Mind you, we could always try a double issue!

I'm very happy to have been able to fit in a few more substantial pieces of artwork this time, by such popular artists as Don Wazejewski, Dave Sim, Colin Wilson, Mark Farmer, and Alan Craddock; and of course a Brian Bolland cover is always a good start! This is one of a pair of Lady Blackhawk illustrations that Brian was kind enough to let Bem have, and I persuaded him to allow it to be used on the cover. Watch out for the second drawing soon.

Comments on the H.M.S. Conqueror series continue to be favourable; we seem to gain new converts to the strip every time! But the number of people directly involved so far has been limited; why not, I say, why not spread our net wider? Therefore a "Dial 'C' for Conqueror" contest is announced: if you have any plot, background details, or characters you think would fit in, let me know --try a whole story or script, if you like! No T-shirts, but credit will be given if an idea is used. And artists -- why not try a sample page of strip? Make the size of the actual art 10½" by 15", on an A3 sheet of paper, and send either an A3 or A4 photocopy--or the original page, but we won't normally be able to return these. And if you want an acknowledgment and/or comment, or further details, please remember to enclose an 11½p stamp.

In the next column is the listing of the results of the latest "Fan Achievement Awards". A bias to Bem is hardly surprising, since two-thirds of the voters got their forms here, but the results are still interesting; not just the leaders in each category -- everybody is a winner to have reached the finals!

And the Eagle Awards ballot forms are, I hope, included with Bem's subscription copies this time, if they've come through from ballot organizer Mike Conroy. The more fans who vote, the more important will be the results! -Martin

# fan achievement awards

1) FAVOURITE NEW FANZINE

| | |
|---|---|
| STARLIGHT | 24.1% |
| The Alternative Headmaster's Bulletin | 18.4% |
| Cygnus Alpha | 13.8% |
| Amon Spek | 11.5% |
| Rabbits Tend To Explode | 8.1% |

2) FAVOURITE FAN ARTIST

| | |
|---|---|
| DAVE HARWOOD | 20.7% |
| Dave Hornsby | 19.5% |
| Mark Farmer | 16.1% |
| ( Graham Bleathman ) | |
| ( Don Wazejewski ) | 11.5% |
| ( Colin Wilson ) | |

3) FAVOURITE FAN WRITER

| | |
|---|---|
| KATHLEEN GLANCY | 26.4% |
| Mike Cruden | 16.1% |
| Mike Taylor | 14.9% |
| ( Nige Edwards ) | |
| ( Maureen James ) | 10.4% |
| ( Keith Williams ) | |

4) FAVOURITE FANZINE COVER OF 1980

| | |
|---|---|
| BEM ≠28 (Brian Bolland) | 47.1% |
| Starlight ≠1 (Dave Hornsby) | 12.6% |
| Cygnus Alpha ≠2 (Graham Bleathman) | 11.5% |
| Bem ≠31 / Masters of Infinity ≠6 (C. Wilson) | 10.4% |
| Bem ≠29 (Mike McMahon) | 8.1% |
| Masters of Infinity ≠5 (Dave Harwood) | 6.9% |

5) FAVOURITE FANZINE STRIP OF 1980

| | |
|---|---|
| H.M.S. CONQUEROR (Dave Harwood, Stephen Baskerville, & Martin Lock) | 32.2% |
| Thundermole (Terry M. Moore) | 23.0% |
| Red Dragon (Jonny Kurzman & M.J. Gibas) | 20.7% |
| The Second British Empire (Graham Bleathman & Glenn Dakin) | 14.9% |

6) FAVOURITE REGULAR FANZINE COLUMN

| | |
|---|---|
| REACTION (Bem) | 31.0% |
| Hoot Hoot (The Owl's Effort) | 17.2% |
| Katholicity (Bem) | 14.9% |
| Fan-Things (Bem) | 11.5% |
| Unamerican Activities (Bem) | 10.4% |
| ( Sigh (Bem) ) | |
| ( Small Fan's Gossip Column (Mirage) ) | 6.9% |

7) FAVOURITE FANZINE ARTICLE OF 1980

| | |
|---|---|
| THE 2000AD INTERVIEW (Bem ≠29) | 36.8% |
| Catwoman Considered (Bem ≠28) | 20.7% |
| DC SF Comics (Bem ≠30) | 16.1% |
| Wertham Revisited (Feature Zine ≠4) | 11.5% |
| The Paul Levitz Interview (Bem ≠30) | 9.2% |

8) FAVOURITE FANZINE (ALL-TIME)

| | |
|---|---|
| BEM | 43.7% |
| Comics Unlimited / Fantasy Unlimited | 14.9% |
| Cerebro | 12.6% |
| Comic Media News International | 10.4% |
| The Panelologist | 6.9% |
| The Owl's Effort | 5.8% |

9) "HALL OF FAME" AWARD

| | |
|---|---|
| RICHARD BURTON | 39.1% |
| Mike Cruden | 17.2% |
| Dez Skinn | 14.9% |
| Colin Campbell | 8.1% |
| George Barnett | 6.9% |

Richard Burton enters our "Hall of Fame" for his past contribution to fandom, joining Alan Austin, who was elected last year.

87 people voted in the second round, following first-round nominations by 62 people. 58 people got their voting forms via Bem, and 29 from other sources. The forms for 1981's voting should be out at the end of the year; they'll be sent out to subscribers to Bem, Masters of Infinity, Ogre...and others, probably!

A 6-issue subscription to Bem costs £3 in the UK or Europe (cheque or postal order, made payable to M. Lock), or $15 by air mail to the USA (American checks should be payable to Steven R. Johnson, but still sent to Worcester). A single issue can be supplied at cover price. 18 back issues are available for £6.50, post free; any six back issues from Bem-21 on can be had for £2 by post, or nine for £3. A full-page advertisement, proportional to A3 or A4, costs £17. No responsibility can be assumed for the return of unsolicited art or manuscripts but, as long as return postage is enclosed, we'll do our best. Contributors are sent a complimentary copy of the issue their letter, art etc appears in -- or if you subscribe, your subscription is extended by an issue. Bem is available wholesale from Titan Distributors Ltd, P.O. Box 250, London E3 4RT. Ruan Lanihorne, Superswipe, and Ed Sallis are members of the Martin Lock Group. For further "small print", see page two...

PREPARE TO BREATHE YOUR LAST,...
...DUCK!
WAUGH!
Y-YOU CAN'T DO THIS...
I- I'M OWNED BY A CORPORATION!
©1981 DAVE SIM
DAVE SIM - FOR BEM!

# A RECOMMENDATION

©1981 Dave Sim

CEREBUS is definitely one of my favourite comic books, with a place pretty high in my personal "top ten" current titles. If you've ignored it because you don't like underground comics, or funny animals, or barbarians come to that, you owe it to yourself to try it out--and, with the first four issues reprinted in SWORDS OF CEREBUS ≠1, now's a good time to investigate. It isn't an underground comic; it's not a bit like Howard the Duck; and if Conan was in the hands of Dave Sim, that comic would be immeasurably more popular than it ever has been!

CEREBUS THE AARDVARK ≠1 came out in December 1977. In the year before that, Dave Sim had drawn two full-length comic books for other people--PHANTACEA ≠1 and REVOLT 3000 ≠1, the latter of which he'd written as well. Having managed these, Dave now knew that he could do full-length comics, rather than just short strips for relatively obscure and slow-moving anthology books. The next step, surely, was to write, draw, and publish his own comic.

In the beginning, CEREBUS was going to be a fanzine, published by Dave's girl-friend Denise Loubert, who was using the name of Aardvark-Vanaheim Press. Aardvark Press had been suggested as the name for this enterprise by Deni's sister Karen; Vanaheim Press came from her brother Michael; and, diplomatically, Deni combined the two. Dave drew the logo for the fanzine, including a cartoon aardvark ("Since I didn't know how to draw a Vanaheim") ...he was also one of the main contributors to the fanzine's first issue. Proudly, the originals, plus money, were passed over to the printer...and all three vanished, never to see the light of day. Sadly, such rip-offs do happen, on both sides of the Atlantic...

At this stage, somebody noticed that Deni ("My spelling stinks on my best days") had misspelt "Cerberus", which is the name she'd meant to give the fanzine; so Dave decided that "Cerebus" was the name of their aardvark mascot. This led, naturally enough, to Dave starting a strip starring this diminutive but furry character; the first page was sent off to Mike Friedrich as a possible new feature for his ground * level comic QUACK, which was running (in issues 3-5) Dave's "The Beavers" strip, a more traditional funny animal series. Luckily (as it turned out), Mike Friedrich rejected it, thus assuring himself a place in comics history right alongside all those people who rejected "Superman" back in the mid thirties.

So, there was this first page, of Cerebus riding a distinctly Windsor-Smith-ish horse into an ancient city, wearing the traditional horned helmet and necklace of medallions. Fairly soon there were another 21 pages to go with it, and the first story was complete. A printer was found, Deni acted as publisher--and 2000 copies of CEREBUS ≠1 were printed, with 24 pages of black and white newsprint inside, and a slick, black red & white cover, with a ⊄1 price. A note on the letters page mentioned that they hoped to publish a second issue two months later; in fact, the plan was to put out three issues, "and if it doesn't go so good, we can always back out and I'll have three sample issues of a comic book when I look for work."

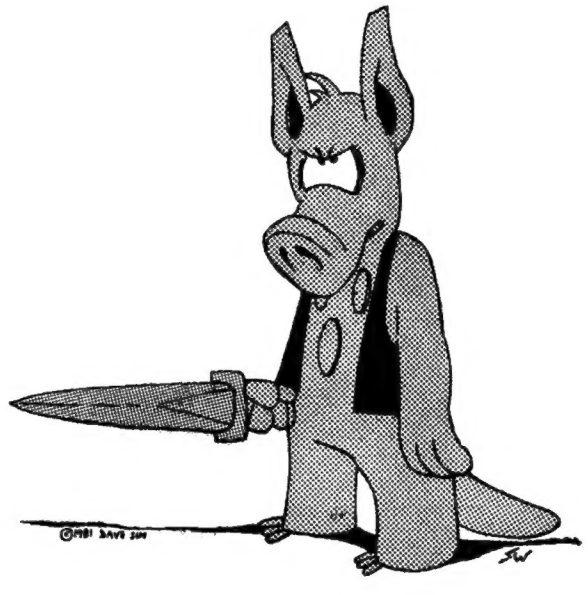
Dave Sim's work has improved greatly in the last three years, both in the scripting and the artwork. The first issue was a pastiche of the Roy Thomas/Barry Smith Conan; the art was very much influenced by Barry Smith, with instead of a black-haired, sullen-eyed reaver as star, a sandal-less aardvark. "He stood only five hands high, had a lengthy snout, a long tail, and was covered with short grey fur..." The story reminded some people of "Tower of the Elephant" (the only Robert E. Howard story Roy Thomas adapted twice -- that is, without changing the names), and is indeed basic sword and sorcery plot number one, the theft of the sorceror's power jewel.

And yet, even in his first appearance, there is something beguiling about the aardvark, and indeed most of the characters. They know the clichés, you can tell, just as we do--and they put a whole new light on things. Cerebus starts out sullen and cynical, but it's not long before the cynicism becomes more allied with a sense of what's practical, and his own dry sense of humour, often tinged with not a little exasperation. He rides off victorious at story's end, with his pouch of gold; we ride with him.

Copies sold, through the network of comics shops, and indeed got as far as Britain; the reaction was positive, including encouragement from Frank Thorne, though Dave looks back wryly to going to cons in Toronto with stacks of issue one, and watching people racing past without a sideways glance, or even dropping their packages on top of Dave's stacks while they looked at the next table's stock of Marvel Two-In-One. "It is a source of no small pleasure that those self-same...people...are now waving twenty and twentyfive singles at us in hopes that we 'have a few sacked away that we wouldn't mind selling.'"

The second issue came out only two months after the first, complete with a page of letters, inspired for its first three pages by Barry Smith's "Frost Giant's Daughter". And its "next issue" page promised "Song Of Red Sophia", as Dave, encouraged no doubt by Frank Thorne's support, began to move away from Mr Smith and broaden his target slightly.

That "next issue" illustration shows Sophia in an abbreviated version of the Barry Smith costume for Red Sonja; when it arrived, however, CEREBUS ≠3 showed Sophia in the chain mail bikini. She was the first direct parody of a sword & sorcery character in the series, and Dave pulled out all the stops. Sophia lived with her father, a wizard, complete with black flowing robes and pointy hat, called Henrot (a little something there for all you anagram fans); he commissioned Cerebus to track down Feras, and make him suffer horribly for besmirching the honour of his girl-child. And this Cerebus does, accompanied by Sophia ...though not quite in the way that Henrot had intended.



Sophia was to return in the tenth issue; and Henrot was back again in CEREBUS ≠19, accompanied by a second, magically created, daughter, whose name, Geet-a, was an old Borealan word meaning "she of the foul mouth and dynamite knockers". However, the fourth issue brought the debut of the most popular -- I say -- popular guest-star in the series, boy. The ruler of a dying race, last lord of Melvinbone...You getting all this down, son? Or am I going too fast for ya? Nod your head if you're with me... Elrod, the albino. He was based on Michael Moorcock's Elric character, as visualized by Barry Smith for CONAN 14 & 15, who in turn used Jack Gaughan's Elric covers for Lancer Books as a model--but his black sword, Seersucker, didn't last beyond page 13, and giving him the voice of the Warner Brothers cartoon character Foghorn Leghorn was a stroke--I say --a stroke of genius. Elrod was and is one of the most confidently and serenely daft comics characters ever allowed to walk around loose, and his debut here brought the humour level of the series up to a new high.

Those are the four issues reprinted in SWORDS OF CEREBUS ≠1, which is well worth about £3 (or ⊄5) of anyone's money -- even if you've got the four originals, as there are some text pages giving the background to the early days, a new cover, and a new 8-page story (which fits neatly after panel 2, story page 16, of issue 11, in "the best three weeks of his life!") laid out for Dave by Marshall Rogers.

Dave was really getting into his stride now, and the book was on a firm bi-monthly schedule, which is quite an achievement for an independent publication. Issue 5 enveloped Bran Mak Mufin and his Pigts in the Cerebus mythos, showed us a giant statue of an ancient god-king looking exactly like Cerebus, and revealed just how bad wet aardvark fur smells, even to its owner. The next issue introduced the fragile con-man & thief f'lass, and his faithful, if slow-witted, companion Turg the Unduly-Tall, who soon learnt a healthy respect for "the-killer-who-looks-like-a-bunny". It also had some of the series' most poignant moments so far, when their potion caused Cerebus, who had previously ignored women, to fall madly in love with Jaka, the dancing-girl.

"Excuse me," Cerebus asks. "Do you know where I could find Jaka?"

"Jaka?" The bearded warrior said. "That whore? What do you want with her, eh, midget?"

Reaction shot of Cerebus, who begins to boil with rage...

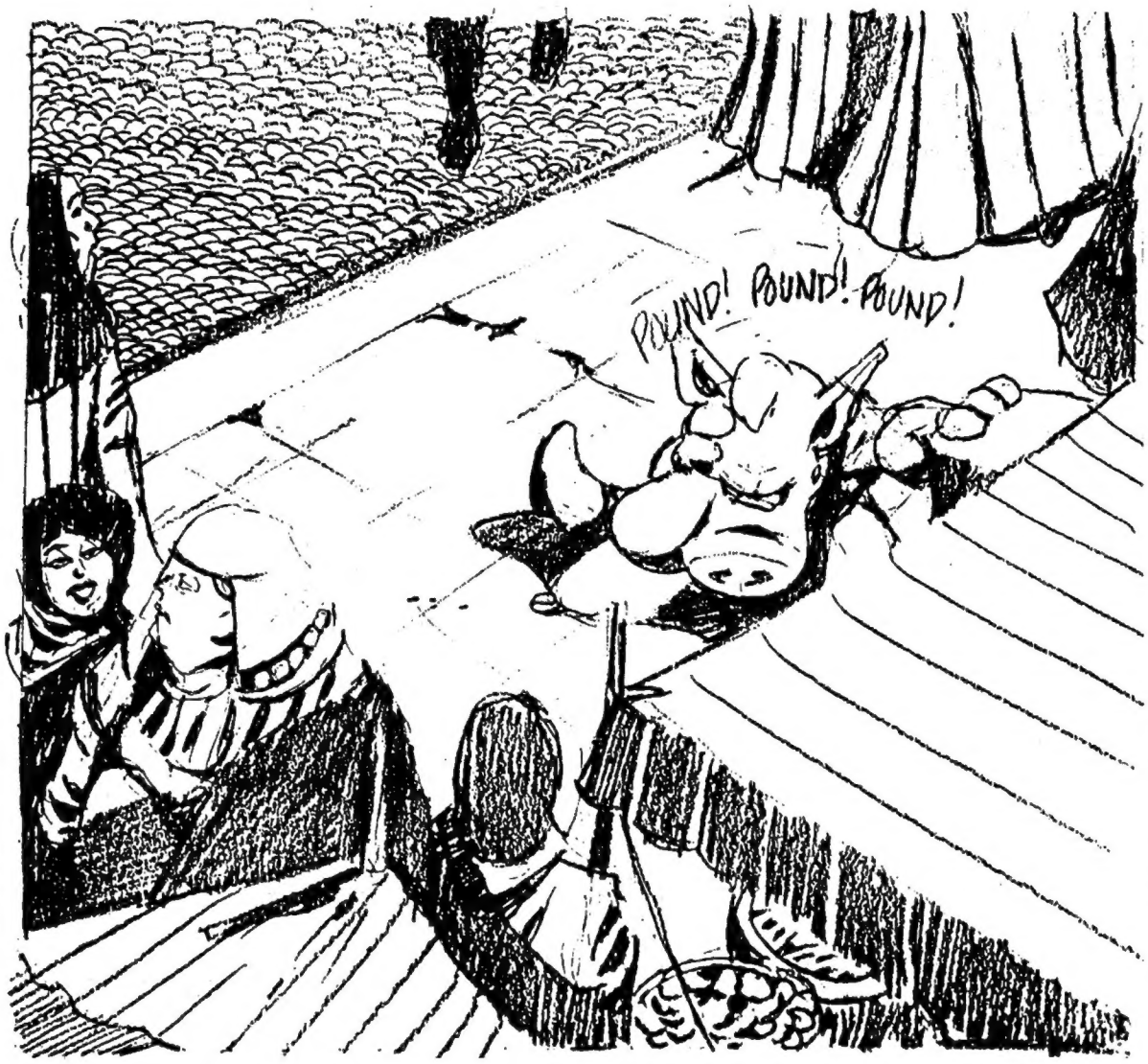
"Say, what's going on over there?" one man asks another.

"Looks like a herd of grey teddy-bears are beating up on that Borealan mercenary..."

Some little time later, in a shaky voice, the Borealan croaks "Like I said--I think you'll make a cute couple --"

"That must hurt", one of the men in the tavern remarks.

"Aye -- I don't think I've ever




seen anyone swallow his own arm up to the elbow."

But potions don't last forever, sadly; issue 7 has Cerebus set to infiltrate the Temple of the Black Sun, where they are about to celebrate "the Festival of the Black Sun", involving sacrifices to a pit of darkness. However, thinking the festival is a party, re-enter Elrod, the idiot albino...from which point, it all gets a bit hilarious -- for the readers, anyway!

The adventures continue. And continuity, so often lacking in "humour" titles, is one of the strong points of the series. We are following Cerebus through his life, and Dave plans to keep going for 300 issues --he's already broken the record for the number of issues of an independent comic, having passed Star*Reach's eighteen last summer, duly noted on Deni's "A Note From The Publisher" page, which keeps us up to date on what's going on behind the scenes. Issue 6 announced that she and Dave were getting married; various trips to & from conventions are noted; issue 12 told us of a nervous breakdown Dave suffered once the previous issue had been completed; and generally, we the readers are involved in the ups and downs of life.

Has there ever been anything like this series before? With Cerebus #14, the book went monthly and, except for some recent printing problems that gave us a January-dated issue appearing in late March, the schedule has been kept to faithfully. Nothing comparable has been done with a "funny animal" as the hero, and once Dave assimilated the Barry Smith influence, the art became original, functional, atmospheric, and direct. It owes more to Eisner now than to Smith. Dave's a story-teller, and he'll take you where he wants you to go, and involve you in what you see. In a review article in THE COMICS JOURNAL #52, Kim Thompson spoke of how "Sim has evolved Cerebus into a sterling protagonist with a sharply defined personality, bringing to light traits both positive (keen intelligence, humor, persistence, inventiveness, and an underlying -- sometimes far under indeed -- ethic) and negative (greed, sarcasm, drunkenness, rudeness, and a coldness toward everyone he meets, usually laced with deep contempt) and usually staying within his own boundaries." Housing a character this complex in a half-height, grey-furred, tubular-footed earth-pig may seem a weird idea at first, but you can always spot the hero in a crowd, and strange reactions are kept to a minimum.

Cerebus enters the tavern, and crosses to the counter.

"I can't serve you here," the landlord bellows, "You're a..."

Imagine the sound of a sword being drawn.

"...a guest...and--eh--I always serve my guests at their tables."

--That's the only sequence I can think of that uses the 'Howard the Duck' type of reaction as a springboard, and it quickly goes on its own way. Mind you, Elrod tends to think of him as a midget in a "bunny suit"...but then, which of us would you rather believe?

Characters like Elrod, and Henrot, and the Cockroach (it's difficult to take Batman's motivation seriously once you have met <u>him</u>) may begin as parody, but Dave imbues them all with a life of their own. And that certainly includes Lord Julius, who, from his debut in issue 14, takes over where Groucho Marx left off ...not to mention Krull, based on the character of Colonel Flagg, the CIA man from M*A*S*H, and a certain Charles X. Claremont and his beguiling school for gifted young ladies!

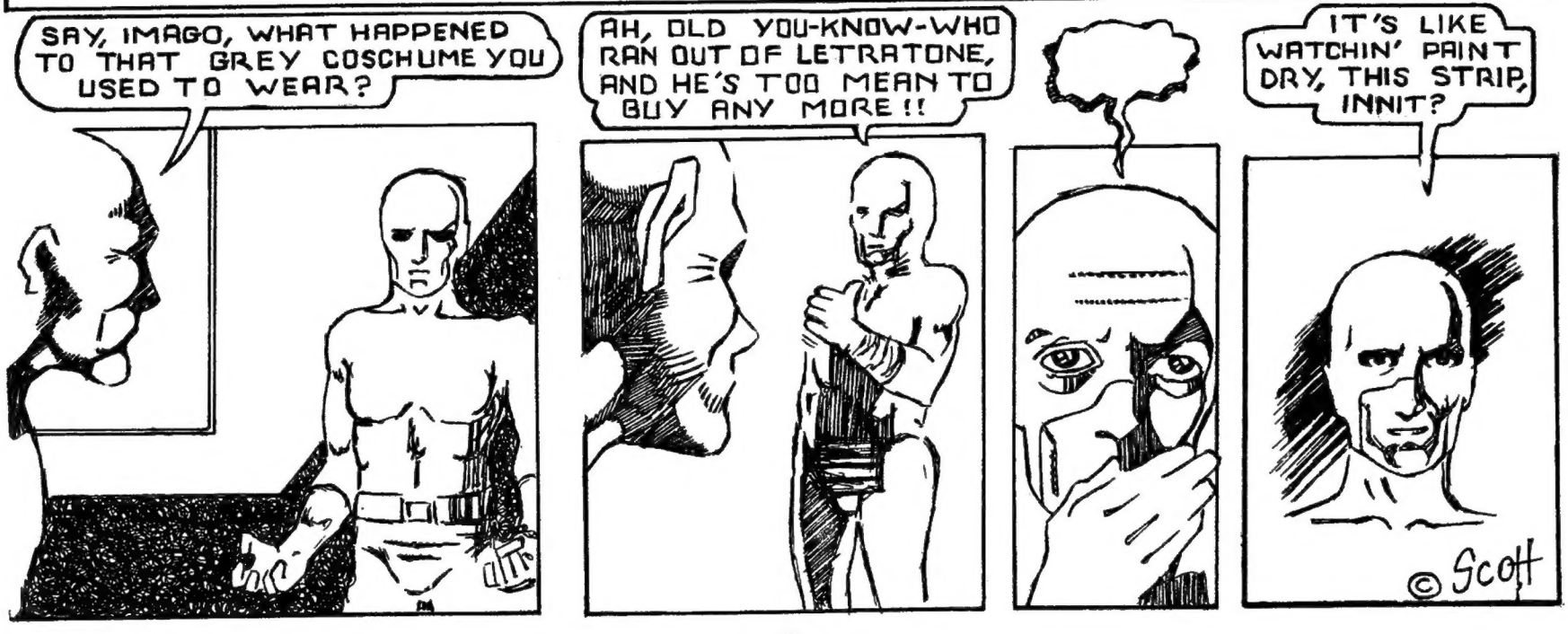
So, I like Cerebus, and the books that he appears in. I admire Dave and Deni for the risks they've taken to get where they are today, and the sheer hard work that they do to put out this comic so often. Dave's talent has grown steadily, and the nearest you'll come to his art in the mass-produced comics is a Frank Miller DAREDEVIL; but nobody writes comics like Dave does.

Certainly, if you can accept Kryptonian orphans, transistor-powered iron suits, magic rings powerless (due to a necessary impurity) against yellow, and even radioactive spiders, you'd do well to accept this particular earth-pig, and pick up his adventures from your favourite local specialist comics shop or dealer.

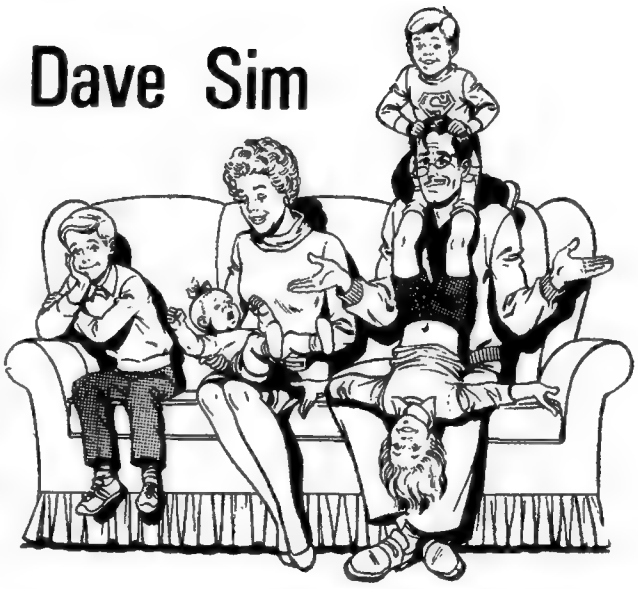
Otherwise--you'll believe an aardvark can stab!

-Martin Lock

THE IMAGO ("IM-AY-GO") by BJ MARTIN :# B3 - UNTITLED —


SAY, IMAGO, WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT GREY COSCHUME YOU USED TO WEAR?
AH, OLD YOU-KNOW-WHO RAN OUT OF LETRATONE, AND HE'S TOO MEAN TO BUY ANY MORE!!
IT'S LIKE WATCHIN' PAINT DRY, THIS STRIP, INNIT?
© Scott

# KURT SCHAFFENBERGER
## interviewed by Howard Leroy Davis & Dave Sim



Howard Leroy Davis: I'm talking with Dave Sim, the creator of Cerebus the Aardvark.. an excellent new series. Also with us is a man who is a professional comic book artist of long standing...one idolised by novice-pro Dave Sim...one who gave us the look of Lois Lane for many years, and who now draws the "New Adventures of Superboy" for DC. As the man who has drawn more issues..and more stories...of Lois Lane than any other, Kurt Schaffenberger; suppose you tell us how you started with Lois Lane...what was the first issue you drew?

KS: I don't remember the story, but I know it was done in 1957. It was when I started with DC.

My family and I were vacationing in Maine when I got a 'phone call from Otto Binder saying that they were starting a new book at DC called "Lois Lane" and that he had recommended me for it. At Otto's suggestion, I called Mort Weisinger, who was to edit "Lois Lane". He asked that I draw up samples. I did...I got the job and drew Lois for 13 years or so,

HLD: 13 years. So you're talking about 1957 to 1970?

KS: Right.

Dave Sim; Did you do the "Showcase" Lois issues?

KS: No, The first Lois I did was #1.

DS: I don't think you did the cover of #1, Curt Swan was doing most of the covers then.

KS: Right. Curt did all the early covers, I did some of the later ones.

DS: How much interchange did you have at DC between guys like you and Curt Swan? Did you ever meet to discuss the comics?

KS: We'd meet in the office now and then, but there was no interchange in the sense of working on stories or whatever. He was working in Connecticut: I was working in New Jersey. We'd meet in the office..and that's about it.

DS: I can remember talking to Gil Kane about the rapid change in attitudes that came about related to comics in the mid-fifties after "The Seduction of the Innocent". He said it was a very odd feeling that became associated with being a comic artist... did you ever run into that?

KS: Oh, yes. We were considered like procurers if we drew comics... A-A-Ah! ...but that's all gone by the board...

HLD: Yes...it's respectable now...

DS: Right.

KS: Almost...

HLD: Almost respectable?

KS:...Somewhat in the same classification as "pimping"...

HLD: (Groaning)...oh, wow...

DS: How much do you want to get into how things happen at DC? Gil Kane told me that so many comic book publishers went out of business in the mid-fifties that the number of markets pared down, and that only a few of those were permissible to work for...or, at least, were getting little flak (from the critics and social workers)... did you find that the editors took advantage of that and treated you differently?

KS: I do know that rates went down considerably at the time and took a long time to build up again.

HLD: That's a sore point among the artists that I've interviewed. Those who were working in the field in the early '50's as you were received in the neighbourhood of $25 per page. If you factor that by inflation, you're underpaid right now.

KS: I'll agree with that...

HLD: It's a problem...but, getting back to Lois...who was writing those early stories?

KS: As I recall, the earliest stories I did were written by Otto Binder. Leo Dorfman did a few, but that was later on... other than Otto Binder I don't know any names of writers back then...but...

Actually, it didn't make much difference who wrote them because Mort would get the script and work it over until it came out a "Mort Weisinger".

Weisinger never did any writing in the sense of signing his name to a script...but he rewrote everything to fit his mold.

DS: I pretty well grew up on Lois Lane, I can remember when the 1964 annual came out. My sister and I were downtown with just 25¢ to get us both home by bus...but we spent it on the annual, which was the only thing we could agree upon...the comic book we had to have.

She used to swipe the Lana Lang and Lois Lane faces...and the fashions.

Are there any outstanding stories that you recall from the body of your Lois Lane work? Any individual stories that you especially remember having fun drawing?

KS: Not really...it all gets to be routine. As a matter of fact, right now I don't even recall the last story before the one I'm working on now...it's all a continuous thing one day after the other. You just grind the things out to the best of your ability.

DS: Wayne Boring once told me that he worked by drawing the story from the script one panel at a time and let the story unfold for him. He would never look at the ending until he got to it. Do you go through the script and start visualizing what's going to be there?

KS: Yes, I always read through the entire script first. That's because in the days of Mort Weisinger when I would get a script a couple of pages at a time...and had to get to work on it without knowing the ending... I'd get to the last page and find out that there was a gimmick that I'd left out of the early part not knowing it was important to the story. Then I'd have to go back and draw it again.

DS: "Lois loses an earring" and the reader is supposed to know it...

KS: Right, right...

Rich Greene:... or the person was supposed to have been a brunette...

KS: Yes...so I make a point of reading all the way through first...

RG: Had you worked with Otto Binder previous to your days at DC?

KS: Oh, yes. He wrote most of the stuff that I did for Fawcetts. He was the definitive writer for all the Captain Marvel characters. I think he wrote more stories about them than anybody else.

RG: So you were familiar with his technique and style...

KS: Yes...right.

John Stefl: Did Mort Weisinger change even Otto Binder's work?

KS: Yes. As a matter of fact he practically drove Otto out of the comic business.

DS: On the subject of that changing...What sort of things bothered Mort Weisinger? What would he change?

KS: It was usually infinitesimal things. He'd change the balloons. The general story would still be the same, but he'd put in balloons here and take them out from there. He always had to make changes. I never once got a script from a writer in all the time that I worked for Mort where he hadn't made changes on it... whether they were for the worse I can't say.

HLD: When did Mort retire?

KS:...1970. I recall because he had written a book called "The Contest" which was made into a TV movie. He threw a party related to it at his house in Long Island... I was invited and attended. It was about the Miss America contest and he had a bunch of ex-Miss America contestants and...I don't know how many...winners serving as hostesses. I know it know it was 1970 because it was just before the birth of my first grandson.

HLD: Then Mort was the editor for Lois Lane during the entire period that you worked on it?

KS: The entire period? Yes...after that I did "Supergirl" for a couple of years...and then for a year or two...after Carmine Infantino took over...for whatever reason, I still don't know... I got no work at all from DC. So I went to work for Archie and a couple of other houses.

Two years later I get a call, "Come back. We need you. All is forgiven." I don't know what the hell was forgiven!

DS: You worked on some rather bizarre heroes in the sixties: Nemesis and Magic Man. What was the publisher?

KS: American Comics Group... ACG.

HLD: Why was your ACG work done under the name "Lou Wahl"?

KS: At the time I was getting name credit at DC and Mort objected to my name being on a competitor's book. I used "Lou Wahl" which was my maternal grandfather's name.

DS: You usually signed your work. That was quite unique for DC... most people didn't have their name on their work before the formal credit section became company policy. I don't think I ever saw "Curt Swan" on any work, in spite of how prolific he was at the time...

KS: With Curt Swan, it was probably because he had never done anything other than pencil ...there was always a collaboration. I suspect that had something to do with it...but I don't know that for sure. Of course, it wasn't until the early 60's that they (DC ) were giving any name credit whatsoever.

HLD: Talking about collaboration, you were obviously quite busy during your Lois Lane years with Lois and other things as well. I'm sure that there were times when there was more work in your studio than you could handle in the way you would like to handle it in the time allowed. Did you use any assistants at the time?

KS: No...on one story I used John Forte, but Mort objected. He felt that he was paying me to do the job and didn't want anybody else working on my stuff. So we let it go at that.

DS: Wayne Boring told me that Mort used to complain about his crowd scenes: "You're not giving us a big enough crowd... You're not drawing enough faces in the crowd"...

KS: Ah... crowd scenes...When Rod Reed was writing for Captain Marvel Jr. at Fawcett's, I accused him of having a "Cecil B. DeMille" complex! (laughter). Whenever he ran out of ideas, he'd throw in a crowd scene. I never did a story for him that didn't have thousands of people in it.

HLD: There's lots of interesting stories in comics...(one was censored from here.)

KS: I never heard that one. I do recall something from ACG...Ogden Whitney was one of their main artists. Whenever he handed in a pencilled story... before it was lettered and before he got it back to ink... every single female in every single panel was naked! It was not until he inked that, he put any clothes on them.

HLD: Anybody know where we can get any Ogden Whitney originals? (Herbie? Skyman?) <u>Uninked</u> originals, that is!

John Stefl: You put Captain Marvel punched out by Superman in one of the Lois Lane stories...

KS: Well, that was a sort of an in-joke... Mort knew what I was doing and we both figured at that time that Captain Marvel was a thing of the past...dead as the proverbial dodo... I put it in, we both had a chuckle over it, and let it go. He was coloured differently.... green instead of red, I think. But then... when reprinted in a Lois Lane Annual... they put the red union suit on him.

RG: Was there much of a hue-and-cry?

KS: No, no comments at all. Not until later when I began getting questions from various fanzines..."Why did you do that?"...just a joke!

DS: I'm sure you saw most of the product coming from DC when you were doing Lois Lane (in the 60's), were there other guys at DC who impressed you?

KS: Yes... Neal Adams... who was a little later, of course... Curt Swan I've always considered top-notch... Bob Oksner... I've never seen anybody who could draw a girl and make her look quite as feminine and charming as Bob Oksner can... and one or two others...

DS: Jim Mooney?

KS: I knew Jim Mooney and I thought he was average... about my style...

RG: Have you seen the Superman movie?

KS: Yes.

RG: What did you think of Lois Lane in that?

KS: Ah...Margot Kidder... yes... I thought she was okay. The movie was entirely different from the comic book.

HLD: A different Lois... not the same Lois, by any means.

KS: No.

RG: Who would you have cast as Lois? Have you ever considered who it might be?

KS: Certainly not the gal who played Lois Lane on the TV series...

HLD: Noel Neill?

RG: She was one.

HLD: Phyllis Coates was the other.

KS: I considered the Lois Lane of the Superman movie quite good.

I was a little bit frightened about this whole Superman movie thing. I didn't know what kind of movie they were going to make. I figured if this thing goes down the tubes, it could be trouble.

HLD: Yes, there was a risk that it could take everything (of the Superman family) down the tubes with it...

KS: But I found out later not so. I was discussing it with some of the brass down there (at DC) and they said that even before the movie ever hit the general public's screen it was already paid for just on the tie-ins... licensing, merchandising, overseas distribution... even if the thing had bombed, it wouldn't have mattered. Of course, the fact that it was a huge success didn't hurt any!

RG: Sol Harrison told me it was paid for in advance...

HLD: When I said I was concerned about the future of the comic based upon the success of the movie, I didn't mean financially. I mean that comics in our time are a trifle fragile as their situation goes... and to have something which would be ludicrous and unsuccessful would hurt the industry...

KS: Yes.

HLD:...especially considering that Superman has got to be the premier comic character of this or any other time... Cerebus not withstanding...

DS: Was it odd to see Superman on the screen after having drawn him so long?

KS: No, because my kids used to watch the Superman series on TV.

DS: George Reeves.

KS: So that part didn't bother me. I was just so damned happy that it was a successful movie!

DS: Right, right!...Rather late in your time with Lois, a decision was made to change her hair style rather dramatically...?

KS: Some kids were writing in.... girls especially... saying that her hair style was too old fashioned. Mort said we gotta keep it the old way because we can't rerun the old stories if we change.... but I guess wiser heads prevailed. I did a whole page of different hair-dos on Lois Lane. They had a contest... write-in which is your favourite. They said draw it like this one ... I don't know if it was really the most popular or not. We've changed it a couple of times since...

We had been drawing her without bangs since the contest. Now Margot Kidder came in the movie with bangs... so now Lois Lane has bangs again.

RG: Was it a specific decision... someone said "Start drawing her to look more like Margot Kidder?

KS: Yes, a specific decision...

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Our interview time with Kurt Schaffenberger was over. The dapper, mustachio'd gentleman rejoined his wife in the Dealers Room of the Christmas Con in Philadelphia. By the way, if you see a minor character in a Kurt Schaffenberger-illustrated story with a neatly clipped black moustache... that's Kurt! -HOWARD LEROY DAVIS

# SIGH...

## by K. Williams

I think I'll start off once again, if no-one objects (sorry, too late...), by picking up on some points raised, or mentioned in passing, in Reaction, okay? (What's that, Martin? No, I haven't forgotten that I said I'd be featuring a re-evaluation of Moon Knight this time; I'll get to that a bit later.)

Chris Ash's talk of swipes prompts me to mention a rather dramatic example I came across recently when re-reading my Iron Fist collection. Don't know how I managed to miss it first time round (well, actually I wasn't particularly gripped by Iron Fist at the time, thinking back...), but there's a panel on page 14 of #9 of that book (drawn by Byrne) that is a straight line-for-line reproduction of the cover of Strange Adventures #214, which featured Deadman as drawn by Adams. I'm not trying to make any point here, just making conversation...

The addendum from Chris Melchert that Martin quoted (in parenthetical reply to Dick Domar) (liked the letter by the way, Dick--but wasn't the language rather mild for you? Probably Martin edited it a good bit, yes?) succeeded in rubbing me up the proverbial wrong way once again. "He just doesn't make it clear he rejects his old taste, but rather seems to defend it." --damn right I do. Said 'old taste' was absolutely valid in its way and in its context. Stuff you and your elitism, CM. (Are you really the pompous, humourless pillock that you appear to be from your letters?) (Er, do you imagine anyone's likely to answer 'Yes' to a question like that, K? -ML) (Don't interrupt me in the middle of a good diatribe...)

Moving along (When are we going to get to Moon Knight, Keithy? -ML) (Don't worry, I'll come to him). Dave Wishart: I'm not keen on Infantino either, as I've said, but I can put up with him in something that's as much fun as 'Dial H'... Don't expect me to be too consistent.

Mo: I too gave up trying to 'convert' people. Brick walls aren't in it; foot-thick titanium steel at least. Let them spend their time reading the Sun and watching Dallas, or whatever superior pastimes they indulge in, say I. Serve 'em right.

Lawrence O'Halloran: Piss off, creep. Sheesh, as if we didn't have enough problems... Serious-answer bit:- Look, fella, I yield to nuns (in the memorable phrase of Peter Cook's, some years back; Dudley Moore replied "There's no point fighting them...") in my love of the English language in all its richness and eccentricity; but I use it--it doesn't use me. ("The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master -- that's all." --Lewis Carroll: "Through The Looking Glass".) I shall continue to express myself in howsoever a fashion I think is most likely to succeed in conveying what I want to communicate. All my experience to date indicates that if there is any way in which a remark of mine can be misinterpreted, people will flock to find that way. Therefore I leave untaken no measures that may serve to clarify my utterances and point up the particular nuances--got it? If it offends your aesthetic sensibilities, tough titty. (Martin: Did you decide to print that crank-letter just to

needle me?) (Of course -ML) (That's what I figured...) (Any chance of getting to Moon Knight now? -ML) (Be patient. I'll come to him.)

Paul Gill: What world do you live in? The media in mine 'complain' about the corrupting influence of films at more or less regular interva s. Frequently I find myself siding with the complainers, for that matter. Heck, I even sympathise with ol' Freddy Wertham. Of course comics are a 'bad influence'. (Waits for mass apoplexy in Fandom to subside.) But I personally happen to think they're a far less bad influence than films, TV, newspapers, and other trivialisation-mechanisms. Anyway, 'bad influence' is a subjective concept. Who's to decide what's 'bad'? For instance, I consider gratuitous violence 'bad', but not too many comics fans seem to share my outlook. ("Well, that's yer catharsis, innit?")

Ed Hillyer: Ta for your extensive 'defense' of Russ Heath, which I wouldn't attempt to improve on. Glad I'm not the only one to appreciate his work.

Joe Mills: Whatever world you live in, I'm sure glad I don't share it. 'Boring' Bems, non-growing comicdom... It doesn't appeal to me at all...

Ivo Steyn: Nothing's wrong with being 'vastly compulsive' ...but of itself it's not really sufficient, in my unhumble opinion. For quite a while I found myself hooked, in spite of myself, on Dallas (True Confessions time again) because it was 'compulsive'. X-Men's a very good soap-opera -- I'd class it right up there with Hill Street Blues -- but that in itself doesn't make for greatness. My personal view is that X-Men did have greatness, but it got discarded, 'cause it got in the way of the cliché plotlines. However. (Ahem! -ML) (You want something, Martin?) (Does the name Moon Knight strike a familiar chord at all? -ML) (I'll get to him, honest...)

John Porter: Ta for corroborating some of my arguments. But the death of Bucky in Avengers #4 a 'mistake'? NO WAY! That was one of maybe half a dozen decisions of Stan Lee's that was irreproachable.

David Gryc (hello again): Interesting to note that you list several of the major flaws (though by no means all) in the X-Men 141-142 two-parter without apparently considering them flaws; and likewise with #145. Fascinating. As for saying Sienkiewicz' style is, quote, "rather like" Adams. Words fail me. Sal Buscema's artwork went down the tubes years back. It was quite a shaker for me recently to look at an Avengers reprint from '69 and see some actually decent work by him. I'd quite forgotten he could do it, once upon a time.

Brian Bolland: I'm unconvinced.

Kath Glancy: Absolutely right about Captain Kirk on Star Trek. Always spoilt my enjoyment of the stories, that. I see yet someone else agrees with me re Ka-Zar's unexplained metamorphosis. Good, good. And you agree about MK too? And you like Sigh? Gee... (I like Katholicity too. This could be the start of a beautiful relationship...)

(What's that, Martin? No, I haven't forgotten about the illo of Moon Knight to our left. I'll get to him. Right now, in fact.)

Lilian Edwards: You ask: "Would K rather have Sienkiewicz go to any lengths not to, God forbid, display an Adams influence, even to the extent of fighting his natural style?" Treating the question as being deserving of a serious answer, we have yet to see exactly what his natural style is. He is still mercilessly swiping from Adams--ask Chris Ash if you don't believe me. If you're not familiar enough with Adams' past work to see it, I can't help you. (I'm not lending you my collection to look at, and that's flat...) But I assure you that I'm not kidding when I say that very few of Bill Sienkiewicz' drawings don't resemble panels drawn by Adams years ago. Chris Ash could probably give specifics; I don't have the time, energy, or patience.

And the remarks concerning Batman were sheer ignorance.

But let me try and get something straight here: I don't mind Marvel having 'Batman' characters. In the Marvel universe it makes for quite a refreshing change from their usual slam-bang super-doers. MK certainly isn't the first 'Batman' type they've had, and is unlikely to be the last. The thing is, other examples have tended to have rather more distinctive gimmicks -- take Shroud, for example. MK's main gimmick, of multiple personalities, was, it seemed to me, flat, contrived, and unconvincing; uninspired and uninspiring.

'Was' being the operative word, however. Now that something interesting is being done with the multiple-personality bit, I'm beginning to change my tune.

It now appears that the multiple personalities have become more than simply a device of MK's; he really does have different personalities, who regard themselves as separate individuals. The guy is actually a gen-u-ine raving schizo. This is interesting.

It's still a shame that the stories aren't, mind. But one can't have everything; perhaps that will come in due course. Meantime, I'm learning to adopt the outlook of those who say: "If we can't have O'Neil & Adams, why not settle for Moench & Sienkiewicz?" We-ell, I guess... (Sigh...)

PART SEPARATE

I went and saw 'Superman II'. The kids there yelled and laughed and cheered. I cried. It was just so beautiful...

Oh, don't bother to tell me it wasn't the comics Superman; I know, and I don't care. Don't bother telling me about all the film's manifold shortcomings; I noticed each and every one of them, and they don't matter a damn.

Migod it was beautiful.

(Sorry, Martin, I'll have to stop here, or else I'll start crying again...)

-K. WILLIAMS

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# THE ROBOT'S REVOLT

Judge Dredd first appeared in 2000AD's second programme, dated 5th March 1977 - but it was in Prog 9, drawn by Ron Turner, that the first signs of the Robot's Revolt could be seen, when, at an exhibition of the latest lines of mechanical men, a criminal used robots to help him commit his crime. Dredd was on the scene, though, and using a new police bloodhound robot, was able to track down the miscreant.

At the end, Dredd ponders "I would not have caught the lawbreaker without this bloodhound robot, but that heap of metal down there was a robot too...how long will it be before robots discover how to break the law?"

The answer was not long in coming; the robots' revolt began the following week, and ran for eight weeks, the very first multi-part Dredd story. It catapulted Judge Dredd to the top of the readers' polls, a position that he hasn't lost since, and was in many ways responsible for the way that 2000AD has developed over the last four years. The previous stories had introduced Dredd, his fellow judges, and the Mega-City that New York had grown into by 2099... now it was possible to start using this setting as the back-drop to something more substantial.

The first robot to revolt was Call-Me-Kenneth, a carpenter robot, seen on the first page robbing the State Oil Store. Two policemen attempt to stop "him"--and soon perish.

Meanwhile, in the Judges' canteen, Dredd is expressing concern about the whole idea of intelligent robots. "We give robots the ability to think, give them human shape, and emotions. How long before they develop that other human trait -- evil!" As the judges talk, Walter is clearing away the dishes and, once he's had the alert about Call-Me-Kenneth and is proceeding to the scene of the crime, Dredd mentally compares the two: "The new advanced carpenter robots are able to build chairs and tables entirely on their own. Not like simple old Walter, who's just a vending machine programmed to be nice to humans!

"Something must have gone wrong with the carpenter's programming, and with the cutting tools it's carrying, it's a lethal killer."

True words, Judge; when he arrives, Call-Me-Kenneth is just finishing cramming a cop into a garbage chute. When the robot declines an offer to have his circuits re-programmed, Dredd blasts its head off. This doesn't stop it, though, as its control circuits are in its chest, protected by thick armour-plating...but Dredd notices a high-voltage cable overhead, and manages to bring it down on the robot, shorting out his circuits so that it literally cuts itself in half.

Dredd is in a grim mood; his worst fears are being realised. "Until today, no one believed robots could deliberately commit crime--how many more will follow?"

The danger from Call-Me-Kenneth seemed to be over, however, and the following week's episode opens in the Council Hall of Justice, as Judge Dredd asks the Grand Judge for special powers to destroy all Hi-grade robots, the ones that do the hardest jobs and would be most difficult to stop if they, like Call-Me-Kenneth, went on the rampage.

The Grand Judge refuses his request; the rampage was a "freak incident", he says, and people wouldn't be willing to take over the work the robots had been doing...

Judge Dredd moves forward. "A robot went crazy once, and it will happen again! We judges are the supreme guardians of law and order, yet you tie our hands against the greatest threat mankind has ever known...

"I can no longer serve you. I hand in my shield!"

How long Dredd might have been out of work we can only speculate, if later that day, during an operation to rehouse Call-Me-Kenneth in a new body and repair the fault in his obedience banks, a nurse hadn't dropped a soldering iron, which sent an activating charge through the robot before anything had been done to cure his anti-social attitudes about "fleshy ones". Since Call-Me-Kenneth's first rampage had attracted a lot of attention, this operation was being screened live on prime-time TV -- and a lot of servant robots heard Call-Me-Kenneth when he told them to revolt, and saw his practical demonstration that "Once you have killed one fleshy one, you will find that killing comes easy!"

And so the robots' revolt begins. The police were unable to cope, and the judges had to take action.

"I have passed the emergency laws to deal with the situation, gentlemen," the Grand Judge says. "We are now officially at war with the robots!"

"But our best man -- the hardliner Judge Dredd -- quit this morning because you refused to pass those same laws", a judge protests. "Who will lead us now Judge Dredd is gone?"

But, never fear; Dredd enters, and reclaims his badge. "I know my duty", he says. "The safety of the citizens comes before everything!"

And a squad of judges rides out on their lawmaster motorcycles to do battle, Judge Dredd at their head...

By the end of the first battle, 104 judges are dead, but the robots seem to have been stalemated, and robot-proof steel barriers have been erected. However, the barriers can't stand against a crack squad of heavy-duty industrial robots that Call-Me-Kenneth, now the commander of an ever-growing robot army, sends against the judges; "The Heavy Metal Kids". Dredd's quick thinking stops this from being a complete massacre; like many mega-city roadways, the one they're on is a mile in the air, and, nimbly dodging among them, he causes the robots to pound the road so hard that it breaks up under them, and they take the long fall.

One of the surviving judges congratulates Dredd on the way he tricked the robots into killing themselves, in effect.

"Yes, Judge Jack. But the robots will just build more. We can't build more judges. If we don't end this war soon... not one human will be left alive in Mega-City One!"

Dredd collapses with exhaustion, and is taken back to his apartment, to the care of Maria, his Italian cleaning lady. As he turns to leave, Judge Jack mentions that they've found where Call-Me-Kenneth has set up his command post. It's in a robotic factory in sector 9...

Dredd struggles to his feet. Rather than have a task force of judges storm the factory, he will go in alone, and face Call-Me-Kenneth, war leader against war leader.

While he's preparing for his mission at the Grand Hall of Justice, Walter is found hiding in the kitchen. The judges who've found him, since many of their comrades have been killed by robots in the last few hours, want to put an explosive shell

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## MADE IN BRITAIN

by Ruan Lanihorne.

through his head, but Dredd stops them. Walter is saying that he still loves humans, and wants to serve them; Dredd will give him a chance to prove himself, by taking him along on his mission, to act as a guide.

And Walter proves his loyalty, helping Dredd infiltrate the factory and, when they're challenged, telling the robot guards that Dredd is a new experimental android, to infiltrate the ranks of the judges.

"I don't know how we served the fleshy scum for so long", the giant robot booms. "It makes my drive wheel shudder just to touch skin...YEUCK!"

"How do you think I feel, brothers?" Dredd replies. "I've got to live in it!"

But Walter and Dredd are captured, and brought before Call-Me-Kenneth. Walter's sent to work on the production lines, while with an evil grin the robot dictator shows Dredd what his fate is to be. His brain will be put into a robot body -- and then, any time an order is not immediately obeyed, a shock will be sent through every brain-cell!

Dredd is left in a cell, wearing a pair of robotic handcuffs that threaten to scream blue murder if he tries to escape. He tries, anyway, of course, but is soon subdued by the robotic jailers.

However, enter Walter, carrying some "gwub" for the prisoner. The handcuffs are suspicious, and rightly so, because it's "highly cowosive acid", which Walter pours over the cuffs, corroding them away to nothing. And Walter has been talking to other robots; many of the older ones are unhappy with Call-Me-Kenneth, finding him a worse master than any human. "If we pwoceed carefully, with their help we have a chance to gwab control of the whole factowy!"

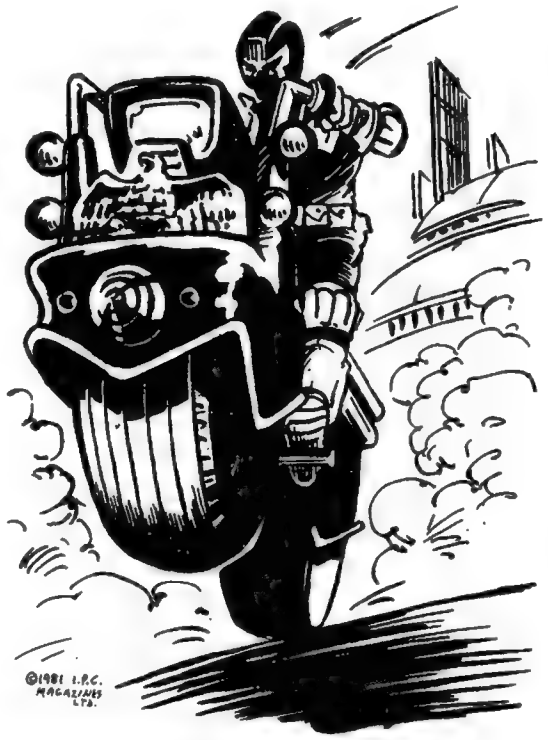
Three of Walter's new friends are waiting outside: Stewart, Howard, and 270/13. And Howard has found something; the computor programming circuit containing the programme for the old law of robotics, which made robots loyal to humans. If it can be put back in the computer that programmes the new robots as they come off the assembly line, instead of a circuit that has them rolling off, right arm raised shouting "Hail Call-Me-Kenneth!" -- well, then Judge Dredd will have his own robot army!

And so it goes; the new, loyal robots roll off the line, and it isn't long before they and the earlier products resort to fisticuffs. With their ranks constantly being added to, the first battle goes well for Dredd and his robots, and the factory is soon theirs. But Call-Me-Kenneth is still on the loose -- in fact, he and his "Heavy Metal Kids" are even now on the steps of the Grand Hall of Justice!

Even Dredd can't beat those babies face to face; the indirect approach is called for. Along with Walter and three other loyal robots, Judge Dredd takes a small sky-bus up towards the floating stratostation that controls Mega-City One's weather, and feeds new instructions into its computer -- calling for an electric storm of 7 million megavolts! It's the only thing that can stop Call-Me-Kenneth's robots in time, but the computer overrides his instructions. They are illegal!

However, Dredd can't be stopped now; he runs the computer wiring through Walter, telling him that, when the connection is made, Walter must short-circuit the computer's over-ride circuits. And this the plucky servo-robot does, though the power surge nearly blows him up...the computer accepts Dredd's orders... and the mother and father of all thunderstorms comes into being right over the Grand Hall of Justice, lightning bolts rain down, attracted by the metal figures, and those it doesn't destroy it short-circuits, so that the "Heavy Metal Kids" are soon knocking each other's blocks off.

Call-Me-Kenneth is hit, but his body is not found, and the final episode (prog 17) finds him, alone and wounded but still more than a match for a squad of security men, heading for an oil-tanker at the Meg-Oil depot, which has enough fuel in its tanks to destroy the city for miles around. This isn't a road tanker, or a sea tanker, that he's after -- it's a sky tanker, and it's lifting off just as Dredd arrives. He leaps and just manages to grab a strut as it rises...




The final confrontation is on top of the giant tanker, high above the city. Almost crazy with pain, the would-be fuhrer of the robots heads for Dredd, whose shots glance off harmlessly, until one goes into a crack in his casing. Call-Me-Kenneth's jerking saw-arm catches an oil pipe, and a jet of the high-pressure liquid sends Dredd flying...to his doom?

As he falls, Dredd fires one last shot at the robot, which stands among the oil-- it ignites!

"Fire...hot... burning me..." Call-Me-Kenneth bellows. "Bad pain...not allowed ...Call-Me-Kenneth forbids it...Call-Me-Kenneth rules!"

And its final words, just as the tanker explodes, are "Top of the world! Bzzzz!"

Dredd is caught in mid-air in a safety net drawn between two fire tenders; the menace is over. The next scene shows the three original robots that helped Dredd and Walter being awarded pleasure circuits by the Grand Judge at a special ceremony ...and Walter himself is granted his freedom, making him the first free robot ever.

Two days pass before Judge Dredd is free to return home to his apartment. There he is met by his cleaning lady, Maria...

"I want-a him out, Judge Dredd. I'm not-a having that --that bug in-a my house and-a messin' my carpets!"

"What the blue blazes are you gabbling about now, Maria?"

"Him! That-a...that-a bug!"

And Walter waddles into sight. "Hello, dear Judge Dredd! Walter is tired of fweedom, Master -- Walter look after you now.."

"I want-a him out, Judge!"

Dredd sits down heavily, rests his head in his hands, "And the citizens think we judges have it easy! I think I'd rather fight another robot war!"

And so the story ends, on a light note. In many ways, it's the most important continued story that 2000AD have ever printed, even though it's only 45½ pages long, including the prelude to the war in prog 9.

Firstly, it established Judge Dredd's popularity, established him as the comic's most important character. And Dredd, right-wing super-cop or no, is a science-fiction hero, in a science fiction world. Almost any other feature in those early days could have fitted into ACTION as easily as into 2000AD. "Invasion" was a war story translated 22 years into the future; "Flesh" was a western, with dinosaurs instead of cattle; "Harlem Heroes" was a sports story, like ACTION's "Spin-ball" with jet packs instead of futuristic motorbikes; "Mach 1" was a speeded-up secret agent; and "Dan Dare", though quite strong on the sf front, was basically a soldier of fortune. Dredd was the "tough cop", of course, but he was more than "One-eyed Jack" with the date changed; he was set in the world of 2099, and he'd be completely out of place in the twentieth century. This world was a real world, and he was a part of it...it looked as if his creators, John Wagner and Pat Mills, had put more work into his background, thought the whole thing through, in a way that just wasn't necessary with some of the other strips.

You don't argue with success; so, gradually, the flavour of the comic changed, and it became more of a true sf comic. Other worlds were built, and more science fiction strips followed; early strips like "Mach 1", while good in their own way, would seem very out of place today.

Secondly, it proved that nothing succeeds like a good, taut serial, even when the character has normally appeared in shorter episodes before; it was therefore possible to try more such serials.

Re-reading the serial now, one of the most striking revelations was how much like a robo-hunter adventure it was; John Wagner took the general idea of robots in charge or in revolt, he took the lighter aspects like belligerent robo-cuffs, and the sillier, but often friendly, robots, and he dropped Sam Slade in it. The resemblance is heightened by the fact that Ian Gibson did his first Judge Dredd work during the serial, drawing the episodes in prog 14 (Walter wescues Dwedd) and prog 17 (the finale) in very much the style that helped make Robo-Hunter such fun.

Buying the original issues of 2000AD that this serial appeared in would be a pretty expensive exercise these days; luckily, plans have been made to reprint it in the "album" format, and if this goes ahead it will certainly be worth buying then, both for John Wagner's intelligent, action-packed and inventive scripting, and for the artword, which is generally good solid stuff. Ron Turner drew the prelude episode in prog 9, plus 11, 13 & 16, in his reliable, sturdy, yet slick, style; for an IPC artist with a flair for sf subjects, he's done surprisingly little work for 2000AD, doing only one more Dredd (prog 21) plus the "Rick Random" try-out later. Mike McMahon drew the episodes in progs 12 and 15; he was already Dredd's most regular artist, and continues to be so to this day, and looking at his imaginative, fluid, approach it's easy to see why. Ian Gibson's two episodes combined strength, a fine sense of mood from menace to merriment, and intricate detail. And Carlos Ezquerra, in prog 10 did good, steady, work, though, despite the work he did designing the strip, it's somehow less like the Judge Dredd we know today.

So, an excellent story sequence, and one of the first of 2000AD's many successes -- 2000AD wouldn't have got where it is today without it.

- Ruan Lanihorne.

THE CAPTAIN HAD A PLAN -- BUT WAS HE HAZARDING H.M.S. CONQUEROR FOR CARLYLE GRAY'S PRETTY FACE?

HE'D TOLD FL'FF AND ME TO BRING AN "EPSILON KIT" FROM THE SHIP. WHAT DID HE MEAN? IN THE END, FL'FF HAD DECIDED HE WANTED THE GRADE "E" PORTABLE STRATEGY COMPUTER, SO WE'D FERRIED IT ACROSS TO THE SATELLITE HOTEL.

# THE BIG GAMBLE

WRITTEN BY: MARTIN LOCK R.D.H 80

C.8

WE HAVE TWO DAYS, MISS GRAY. I THINK WE CAN HELP YOU, BUT IF NOT, THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO TRY.

I'M GRATEFUL FOR HOW YOU'VE ALL BEEN ACTING; I HAVE NO CLAIM ON ANY OF YOU, YOU SHOULD HAVE DISOWNED ME ENTIRELY.

NONSENSE. NOW, THIS COMPUTER THAT WE HAVE HERE CAN PLAN A BATTLE BETTER THAN NAPOLEON. MY FEELING IS THAT, IF WE GIVE IT ALL THE DATA, IT COULD BREAK THE BANK AT THE CASINO HERE, AND GET YOU OFF THE HOOK ONCE AND FOR ALL!

1

RUSSELL, IF THIS HAIR-BRAINED SCHEME IS DISCOVERED, I'LL SEND YOU TO THE ORGAN BANKS PERSONALLY!

SIR--THE WHEELMEN ARE INTELLIGENT, ADMIRABLE WORKERS, AND THIS HOTEL IN SPACE IS A FINE PLACE.

BUT THE GAMBLING SET-UP HERE *STINKS*, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT LEADS TO LEGAL MURDER OF SOMEONE WHO, IN A MOMENT OF WEAKNESS, HAS BEEN LURED BEYOND THEIR MEANS TO GAMBLE THEIR VERY LIVES!

I INTEND TO STOP THAT, IF I CAN; I NEED THE HELP OF EVERYONE HERE, AND ESPECIALLY CARLYLE GRAY'S ASSISTANCE. SHE KNOWS THE GAMES THEY PLAY HERE; THE WHEELMEN WON'T BE SURPRISED TO SEE HER GAMBLING AGAIN TONIGHT, ON A STAKE WE SHALL PROVIDE.

OUR CAPTAIN'S TAKING THIS ALL VERY PERSONALLY, FRANK.

MISS GRAY'S AN ATTRACTIVE WOMAN.

YOU'RE A RATHER CYNICAL FELLOW, FRANCIS MY FRIEND.

I CERTAINLY AM, COOL HAND OLD BUDDY--BUT I'M WITH THE CAPTAIN ON THIS.

LUKE

SO LET'S FIND THAT CASINO, AND GET A RUN OF RESULTS FOR THAT COMPUTER TO ANALYSE.

ROW OR RANK, ODD OR EVEN--PLACE YOUR BETS PLEASE, GENTLEBEINGS.

WELL, THIS IS IT! AND EVEN THOUGH I KNOW CARLYLE IS IN CONSTANT MENTAL LINK WITH OUR COMPUTER, I DON'T MIND ADMITTING I'M NERVOUS AS A KITTEN--IF FL'FF WILL FORGIVE THE EXPRESSION.

LET'S START SLOWLY, WITH EVENS, MY FRIENDS.

THIS IS THE TRICKY PART--THERE'S NO SYSTEM, NO PATTERN YET. IF THIS FIFTY-FIFTY CHANCE DOESN'T COME OFF...

...WELL, THAT'S HALF OUR MONEY RIDING ON THAT HOLOGRAPH CUBE AS IT BLINKS FROM SQUARE TO SQUARE IN A WAY ALLEDGEDLY RANDOM.

SQUARE 18; WE PAY RANK AND EVENS.

GOT IT! WHEN YOU'RE GAMBLING, YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE A LITTLE LUCK!

MIND YOU, SOME LIQUID-STATE TECHNOLOGY HELPS, TOO!

THE LINK IS HOLDING, GENTLEMEN... I'M GETTING SOME STRONG DATA COMING THROUGH--AND IT WOULD APPEAR THE GAMING TABLE IS NOT IN A TRULY RANDOM MODE.

TO PUT IT IN MORE GENERAL TERMS, THAT TABLE IS RIGGED--IT LOOKS AS IF MISS GRAY WAS CHEATED, IN A *DISHONEST GAME!*

3

SQUARE 46; WE PAY ROW AND EVENS. LUCK IS WITH YOU TONIGHT, MISS GRAY -- I'M GLAD.

MISS GRAY, I DIDN'T EXPECT TO SEE YOU IN THIS ROOM AGAIN.

I'M SURE AN ARM OR A LEG MUST HAVE DROPPED BY OCCASIONALLY, LAFARGE.

I'M FOLLOWING YOUR LEAD, CARLYLE--WHEN YOU'RE HOT, YOU'RE *HOT!*

I MAKE THE ODDS 63%, MY FRIEND, WHICH IS GOOD ENOUGH.

YOU MAY CONTINUE, MY DEAR GIRL. YOU HAVE, AFTER ALL... NOTHING TO LOSE!

BUT QUITE A BIT TO GAIN, MISTER MANAGER.

59, ROW AND ODDS. WELL DONE, MISS GRAY.

YOU ARE RELIEVED, CROUPIER--I AM TAKING OVER. JUST REMEMBER, CARLYLE; YOU MUST BET ON EVERY ROUND, OR FORFEIT YOUR WINNINGS!

AND SO IT WENT ON. CARLYLE LOST A FEW, BUT SHE WON A FEW MORE WITHOUT BEING RECKLESS--AND SOON HER SALVATION SEEMED WITHIN REACH!

ANOTHER WIN WOULD TAKE YOU OUT OF OUR DEBT, MISS GRAY. FOR YOUR OWN SAKE, I WILL CONCLUDE THE GAME AT THAT POINT.

AND THAT'S WHEN IT HAPPENED!

4

THE LINK! IT'S BROKEN!

CAN'T YOU RE-ESTABLISH IT, FLUFFY?

IMPOSSIBLE, CAPTAIN. I'M AFRAID CARLYLE IS ON HER OWN AGAIN...

RUSSELL

HURRY UP, YOUNG LADY. PLACE YOUR BET, OR PAY THE FORFEIT!

MY LAST GAMBLE, LAFARGE.

GALLANTLY TAKEN. ARE ALL BETS ON? *PLAY!*

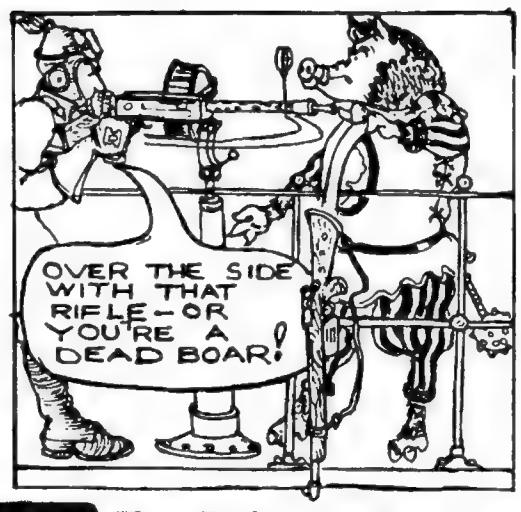
AND THEN CAME THE LONGEST TEN SECONDS OF MY LIFE, AS THAT CUBE HOPPED FROM SQUARE TO SQUARE.

THE ODDS WERE LONG ... BUT ... WELL...

WE'VE *DONE* IT! Oh, HOW CAN I THANK EVERYONE, AFTER ALL THE TROUBLE I'VE BEEN?

DON'T YOU JUST *LOVE* A HAPPY ENDING?

FIN.

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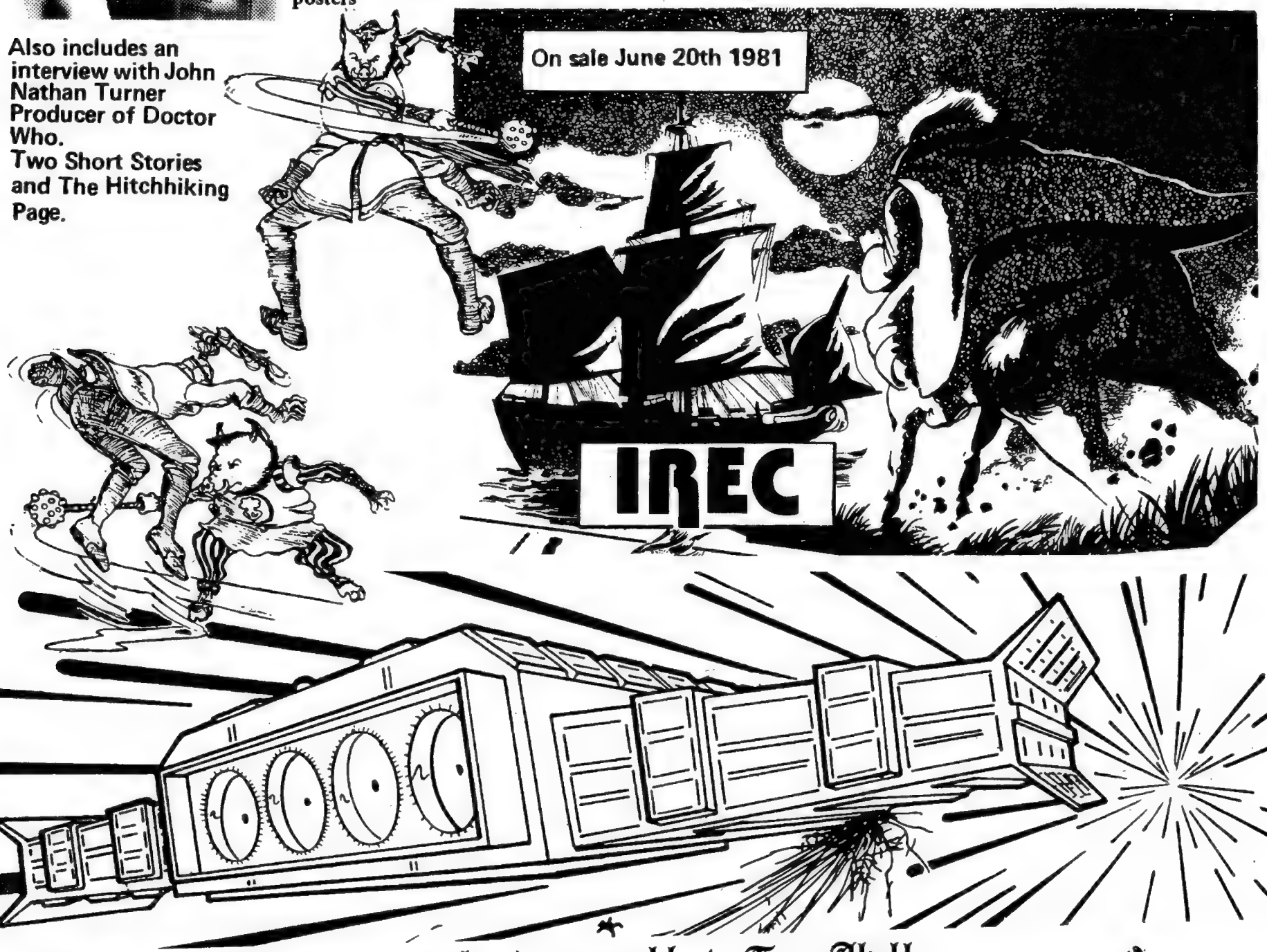


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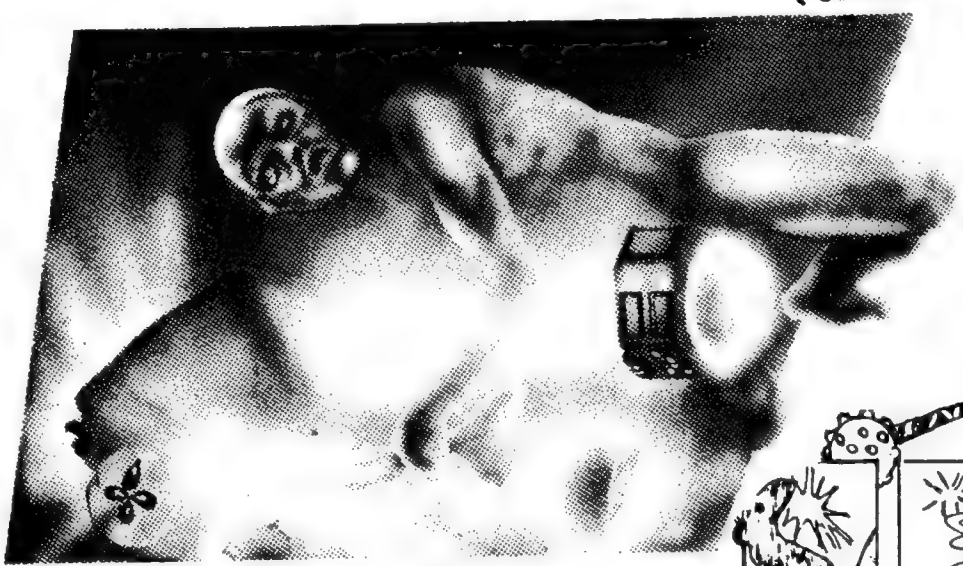


# Reaction

**Graeme Bassett**

Katie Glancy can rest assured that "Sappho And The Sex Werewolves" does not exist. It was felt that the cost of shipping all that yak hair (or whatever it is they use to simulate lycanthropy these days) over to Belgium was too prohibitive, so the title has been altered to "Sappho And The Sex Vampire". While we're on the subject of the Scots Dumpling, I wonder why she's been so silent about that inaccurate racial slur being published every month... I am talking of course about "Frenchy", in the pages of MOON KNIGHT. I mean, I always wondered if we'd get to see Captain Frog again, but he seems out of place in an allegedly serious comic like that. It's a glib statement, but if the "Frenchy" character was an Algerian or a Nigerian, they'd have taken great pains to "legitimise" the character, editing out "national traits" (such as reading girly mags, in Frenchy's case), having him speak received English, probably without contractions.

Now, since I wrote a glowing review of Moon Knight back in the dim distant days of Bem's past /(Bem-21, still available for 40p from the editorial address...)/ you may feel that I've fallen prey to the N.M.E. syndrome of buildin' 'em up and when they've hit the top slaggin' 'em off, let me just second the person who said "The Moon Knight of WEREWOLF BY NIGHT and the Moon Knight of MOON KNIGHT are two different people."

Now, to K. Williams. Am I right in thinking that the hardback in which he first encountered "Plastic Man" might be one of the "Adventure Annuals" published circa 1953 by the Popular Press. They featured some imaginative covers by Denis McCloughlin (the "Okay Adventure Annual" depicts three jeep-borne cowboys pitting guns and grenades against a slobbering dinosaur, while a Jules Verne rocket ship zooms through the background), the usual text fiction, and a surprisingly large number of uncredited colour and b/w reprints of (among others) "Arizona Raines", "Black Roger", "Doll Man", and "Plastic Man".

While on the subject of the Killer himself, I'd disagree with his opinion of KA-ZAR as a dead boring arrogant creep. Surely it's the character's vanity which makes him infinitely preferable to your typical superhero with a typical superhero's modesty. Similarly Quicksilver was an interesting supporting character because of his oppressive right-wing attitudes. I think, before they decide to "lobotomise" any more "undesirable" characters, someone should tell Marvel that it's not necessary for a hero to be flawless. There are one or two precedents for the "undesirable" hero... Sidney Carton and Alan Breck come instantly to mind, but I'm sure there are a few more.

But to end on a positive note, that was a very nice Dave Gibbons interview from old Major Mad. I was particularly interested in Dave's comments on the changeover from Baker to Davison. I've been entertaining myself with thoughts of how they might achieve it...the most satisfying answer would be probably some kind of photostrip summary of "Logopolis", leading into a strip adaptation of the first new adventure, but of course the dreary old BBC wouldn't agree to that. Of course, a really satisfying solution would be a last-minute replacement of Davison by someone. Anyone. I mean, even Sandra Dickinson would be preferable to that goon. I mean, did you see him sitting there with that stupid self-satisfied grin on his face? ARRGHHH!

**John Porter**

Re Kathleen Glancy's comments on my previous letter, firstly the sign outside the mansion says it's a "School For Gifted Youngsters", with 'school' and 'youngsters' being the operative words. Obviously, the older X-persons ought to stick around, but a few more school-age mutants would be more realistic. Of course Franklin Richards is a mutant. He received his powers as a direct result of his parents' exposure to radiation. If that isn't Marvel's definition of a mutant, what is? And the FF have shown no inclination at all to train him in the use of his powers -- in fact, his parents don't seem too wild about him having them in the first place. Xavier is used to working with super-powered youngsters, and the location of his school is far less widely known than that of the Baxter Building, so Franklin would be 'safer' there.

Turning to Dredd and Lopez, while I agree that it was out of the question for Dredd or Larter to use the oracle spice, Dredd made no attempt to find out whether the robots were receptive to it, or to ask for volunteers. And, come to that, what was to stop him from calling at the nearest penal colony and 'borrowing' a 'volunteer'? He's shown no such scruples in the past. And he'd been conducting what amounted to a campaign of intimidation against Lopez prior to ordering him to use the spice. Not my idea of a hero, anyway.

Before Kathleen thinks I've got something personal against her, I have to say that I agree entirely with her comments on E. Nelson Bridwell and the Super Friends. I just hope that he had enough warning of the cancellation to finish the series and return the Wonder Twins to Exor, since I don't suppose they'll appear anywhere else. (And who wants to bet that Wendy and Marvin won't join the JLA when they graduate?) Still, it's a shame that nobody else at DC seemed to like the book. Conway totally ignored SF18 when he wrote Brave & Bold #171, and who else spotted Bob Rozakis' snide "ENB insists it takes place on Earth-One" in an 'Answer Man' column. Hopefully, 'Dr Mist's League of International Heroes' #1 will be announced soon... /(If ENB is to write some 'Dial H For Hero' stories, perhaps some familiar faces will soon be cropping up there.)/

So Lilian Edwards finds the comics news depressing? Let's have a look, then. What's this? Colan and DC. Colan and Batman! And possibly even Colan, DC, Marv Wolfman, and Dracula! Well, to be quite honest that's the best news I've heard since Roy Thomas announced he was pulling up his roots last year. All this and a new costume for Wonder Woman too -- hopefully more suited to a warrior, and less like a bathing beauty's. But the Marvel news, that's enough to depress anyone. Fewer pages, editor sacked, and there are even rumours that the Bullpen Page will be back. In regard to Shooter taking over the Avengers, let me see if I've got this straight. Anyone who joined the team after about 1965 is out, so the line-up is Thor, Iron Man, Yellowjacket, Captain America, the Wasp, and the Hulk. So much for any claims that Marvel teams and characters are constantly evolving. Or perhaps this is Shooter's way of returning Marvel to its roots in tribute to the 20th anniversary of super-heroes who argue amongst themselves and have acne.

As for Bem itself, I enjoyed the Gibbons interview and HMS Conqueror most. The only things I find myself skipping over are some of the obscurer items in Bemuscene and Fan-Things. Only one thing still puzzles me -- are "Ed Sallis, Ruan Lanihorne, and Superswipe...members of the Martin Lock group" in the same way that "Dame Edna Everage is a member of the Barry Humphries group"? /(Too right, possum -- I noticed that particular credit in the Radio Times, and promptly appropriated it!)/

**Dale L. Coe**

I must respond to Kath Glancy's comments on the X-Men and Chris Claremont.

Hello, Kath. You call Chris Claremont a hack. Why? Because he believes some women do fall in love 'at first sight?' Or is it because you are asked to exercise your brain and assume that the story in Spider-Woman #38 does not occur at the same moment in (Marvel-) time as X-Men #146?

Or is it, in fact, simply because Capt. Forrester told her crew that she hired Scott Summers because she liked his looks? If that is so, Ms Glancy, then it is my duty to explain your misconception. Read that page in X-Men #144 again. I automatically assumed when I read the passage in question that Ms Forrester was responding to her crewman's question "Why did you hire him?" with sarcasm. "Because he's beautiful." I don't deny that the lady's emotions affected her decision to take on Scott, but I also feel that she recognized a strong and willing worker in him. If the Captain had to justify her decisions to her crew, then I would agree she would be a poor leader.

Having said all that, I agree that the absence of life-jackets during a storm is a boo-boo. But doesn't that mean that Mr Claremont is human, and thus prone to slip up now and then? As I feel he did by not showing the scene in which Angel expressed a desire to rejoin the X-Men, rather than simply having him join up between issues 138 & 139. That mistake (and remember, to others it may not be a mistake) doesn't mean he's a hack. It just means he could do better.

Can't we all?

Regarding Bem, I think the review section should be altered to feature a maximum of two reviews, giving the reviewer more space for critical analysis, as put forward in "News At Bem". I would prefer that the bulk of material (say, 99.9%) in Bem should be on comics. Comics, after all, is what started fandom off with zines and clubs and all, right? By 'comics' I mean 'mainstream' comics -- Marvel, DC, Comely, not these godawful 'underground' obscenities I've seen at marts.

Which brings me neatly to one of my pet hates. Having collected comics (Marvel and DC) since 1963, it was only 'round about 1977 that I became curious about the so-called 'underground' or 'alternative' comics. It was about that time that I first attended comic marts in Liverpool, so I had my first look at the alternatives to Marvel and DC. What did *I* find? Terrible art, 4-letter words, tits & bums. To put it another way--crap.

Now, 'Elfquest' is what I call an 'alternative' or, better yet, an 'adjunct' to 'mainstream' comics. It seems to me that some people work under the delusion that, if the Comics Code does not approve of, say, swear-words beginning with 'F', then it must be 'art' to put 'fuck' in every panel of a story.

Anyway, I must just add that I agree wholeheartedly with David Gryc that comics are 'looking up'. For me, IRON MAN is the best comic on the market, closely followed by TEEN TITANS, X-MEN, ROM, GREEN LANTERN, MOON KNIGHT, POWER MAN/IRON FIST, DAREDEVIL, MASTER OF KUNG FU, and FLASH, not in that order. But isn't it a shame how low AVENGERS has sunk these days? If I didn't want to keep my collection complete, I would have ditched it by now. At least it can only get better. Or can it? The Hulk? Ye Gods!

Mike Taylor

Okay, so maybe, as I'm "assistant editor" of Bem, writing LoCs would seem a trifle strange, but there are a couple of things I want to get down.

Firstly, the cover of Bem-33 came out terribly. What was an excellent cover by Dave Gibbons was reduced to a mess by the colour--and what's really upsetting about that, as far as it concerns me, is that my name is 'credited' with doing the colour separations, when in actual fact your printer seems to have contributed more towards it than I did. How the hell could a professional printer turn over stuff like that with a straight face -- and expect to be paid for it?

To begin with, all the tones completely filled in. Not only did this result in light blue tones becoming solid blue, but it also made the greens look messy. The fact that the magenta colour was extremely weak meant that all the areas which should have come out as brown were reduced to a dark green. Add to this the fact that the light grey tones became very messy and grubby--and you have your cover. Okay, so maybe most people won't know that the rocks were supposed to be brown, and so on, and perhaps it's only me, Dave, and one or two other people who'll know this initially, but even so--it's not a good advertisement. You'll remember that I had expressed my belief that you should have the cover done by your old printer, after having seen Bem #32. It's fair enough that you should try to give your new, cheaper printer another chance -- but to actually accept such a messed-up job from him a second time really, I would've thought, wasn't too wise. For one thing, Dave spent a lot of time producing a bold, striking illustration for you for free; surely the least we can do in such a case is try to ensure that the art is presented as well as possible. Will comics professionals be so willing to do free work for you when they know that it may very well be degraded by bad printing? Could you expect them to?

From my point of view also, it's very frustrating. A lot of money buys a little tone these days. At a time when I was very pushed for spare hours, putting all that tone down took a good proportion of what time I had available--I could've done it all in solid colours in a third of the time and expense. Besides that, it's not a nice feeling to be part of the process which brings down a piece of good artwork. If the colour had been done right -- I think it would have been a very good cover.

/(Agreed. Mechanically, the printing on Bem-33 was a great improvement over the previous issue, but unfortunately the slightly blue backgrounds to the letratone areas were "picked up" by the printer's camera in some places, and this was not spotted by them. This is not going to happen again; from now on the highest standard of reproduction will be required. I apologise to you, and Dave Gibbons, and Dave Harwood, and Leigh Baulch, and even to Superswipe, whose Dan Dare and Artie Gruber illoes were also marred. For various reasons, Bem works to a deadline, which often hasn't left time for reprinting substandard pages.)/

Besides that, though, it was a good Bem; better than usual, even. The Gibbo interview came out okay, and whilst some of Dave Harwood's tones also suffered, the Conqueror strip was as enjoyable as ever.

As far as your open question re the reviews goes, I'd say make 'em longer, and more constructive. (Of course, then I'll probably get fans with little time sense accusing MoI's reviews of being too like the ones in Bem...) Either that, or ditch them altogether. You should ask yourself what the purpose of reviews should be, and how they can best achieve this aim. Frankly, reviews like the ones K. Williams is frequently churning out are just damned irritating. Christ almighty, was that thumb-nail sketch of a review supposed to give the reader anything in the way of information as to whether or not the issue is worth buying? It's unconstructive, cynical and totally self-indulgent, as if KW is more interested in building his ego rather than reviewing the comic. He accuses Moench of doing a 'Jack the Ripper' type story because the 'Yorkshire Ripper' murders might have made it 'topical'. A vastly unfair assumption -- Doug may have only heard of the Yorkshire Ripper vaguely, or perhaps not at all; I don't know how much English news coverage they get in America, but to off-handedly state that the writer is showing bad taste is purposely emulating real life events. Is KW psychic? How can he know what inspired Moench?

This review aside, just about every review I've read credited to K.W. in the past few issues has angered me due to their off-hand dismissive manner, and their basis almost totally on personal prejudices. Few of the other reviews fare better in this issue. Ken Moore, Stephen McGonagle and Lilian Edwards all are restricted by the amount of space they give themselves, and Christine Padgett's review was overly self-indulgent. (How many of Bem's readers catch this sort of in-joke?) At least Pete Scott was there to give a bit of sense of thought to the scene.

Whew! It's quite interesting what can come out of the ol' tripewriter when I get going. And speaking of tripewriters, thanx for mentioning the fact that there was a good reason for the lateness of MoI.

John Green

I have just finished Bem #33, the cover was so good I bought a second copy so I could stick it on my wall. The interview with Craig Russell was so-so, the Bem News Service was as good as ever. But the highlight of the whole issue (for me anyway) was the Dave Gibbons interview; it was so well done that to dislike it you would have to be a cretin.

I can't say much about the Thundermole strip, apart from "I like it". The feature on Mind Wars was well done, perhaps somebody could do a feature on The Trigan Empire! I really like the HMS Conqueror strip; I didn't care for it much before, but now I think it's hot stuff.

Reaction was a good read, but, to whom it concerns --when I wrote the letter that got printed in Bem #32, I didn't mean to insult anyone, I was only asking a question and I agree with the answer I got. The best letter this time was Brian Bolland's, I agree with a lot he said. I also liked Chris Ash's letter, I agree also with Paul G. Gill about the unjust criticism comics get...all in all, a very good Reaction.

I don't really like or dislike Mal Burns' column, but it's very good as features go. I really enjoyed the shorter than usual Bemuscene; please don't end this feature, as it's good to have a review column, maybe not such a lengthy one though.

I was glad to see SAGA get mentioned in Fan-Things; if anybody wants to contribute to it, please do so, because without enough contributions there may not be another issue -- what a horrible thought!

Ed Hillyer

OK, OK, I'll subscribe already. Here's three quid, which I pawned the last of my worldly possessions to obtain -- I hope the next six issues of Bem are worth it, because I'm going to miss my mother.

This "little rascal" would like to point out that he ain't so little, OK?

It's just that everything else is so big! I found the elongated Reaction section this issue really interesting and it is still, to my mind, the most enjoyable section of the magazine. As a number of people noted, it is satisfying to see some actual comics talk (WAM, BAM, SOCK!) back in the limelight again.

To whit... (OK, I'll cut the owl impressions!) Joe Mills inspired a few interesting notions in my mind about comics writing and its various artistic and literary levels. Having written them out, they sound too boring, so I'll be brief here and leave it for someone else to begin a major debate.

Whatever the public prejudices about comics and their audience, it is quite obvious that the age range the companies' products are aimed at is very large. For instance, there is a large gap, an abyss even, between Spidey Super Stories and Epic. Less extensive but still as obvious is the difference between such books as She-Hulk and Daredevil. Team books, meanwhile, have always seemed to have had a cosmopolitan, generation-spanning appeal --Avengers, X-Men and the Titans are some of the most popular comics on the market. Outside of Marvel, DC, and lower-aimed Whitman comics the material (comix) is even more specified. The audiences are usually more exclusively adult, or perhaps in some cases just more perverse, freed from the Code as these books are. Elfquest has perhaps the widest age-range and gentle appeal, since I for one can't encompass the idea of anyone disliking such a distinctly creative, human (elfin) achievement. (As I am thinking of a U.K. fan club for Elf-freaks, so we can all gurgle over the latest Elfquest together, I would like very much to hear from some fans of the book. If you are not one -- I would press you to buy a copy. And no, that's not an indecent proposal...)

Still, back at the age debate and going off on a tangent, I think there have been many writers who have distinctly cared just what audience they were aiming for. Doug Moench comes to mind, a great humanitarian from his ever-so-personal achievement with Master of Kung Fu. This comic remains unique for its strong core of sage philosophy and its reflective inner moralising, existing even in the midst of kung fu action, violence, spy-fi intrigue, and madness. Existing alongside and overpowering that element, Doug Moench always leaves a final piercing thought for the reader. I, and I'm sure many other MoKF fans, get more of a kick (as it were) out of the words these days--I could stand an issue of Shang-Chi merely sitting and thinking. In fact, I'd positively enjoy it. Outside of MoKF, meanwhile, Doug can produce very juvenile (I'm sure deliberately juvenile) material, such as Godzilla and Shogun Warriors. He can also revel in weird fantasies that have a more general appeal --Weirdworld and, if anybody remembers it, his really crazy Ka-Zar serial with Val Mayerik.

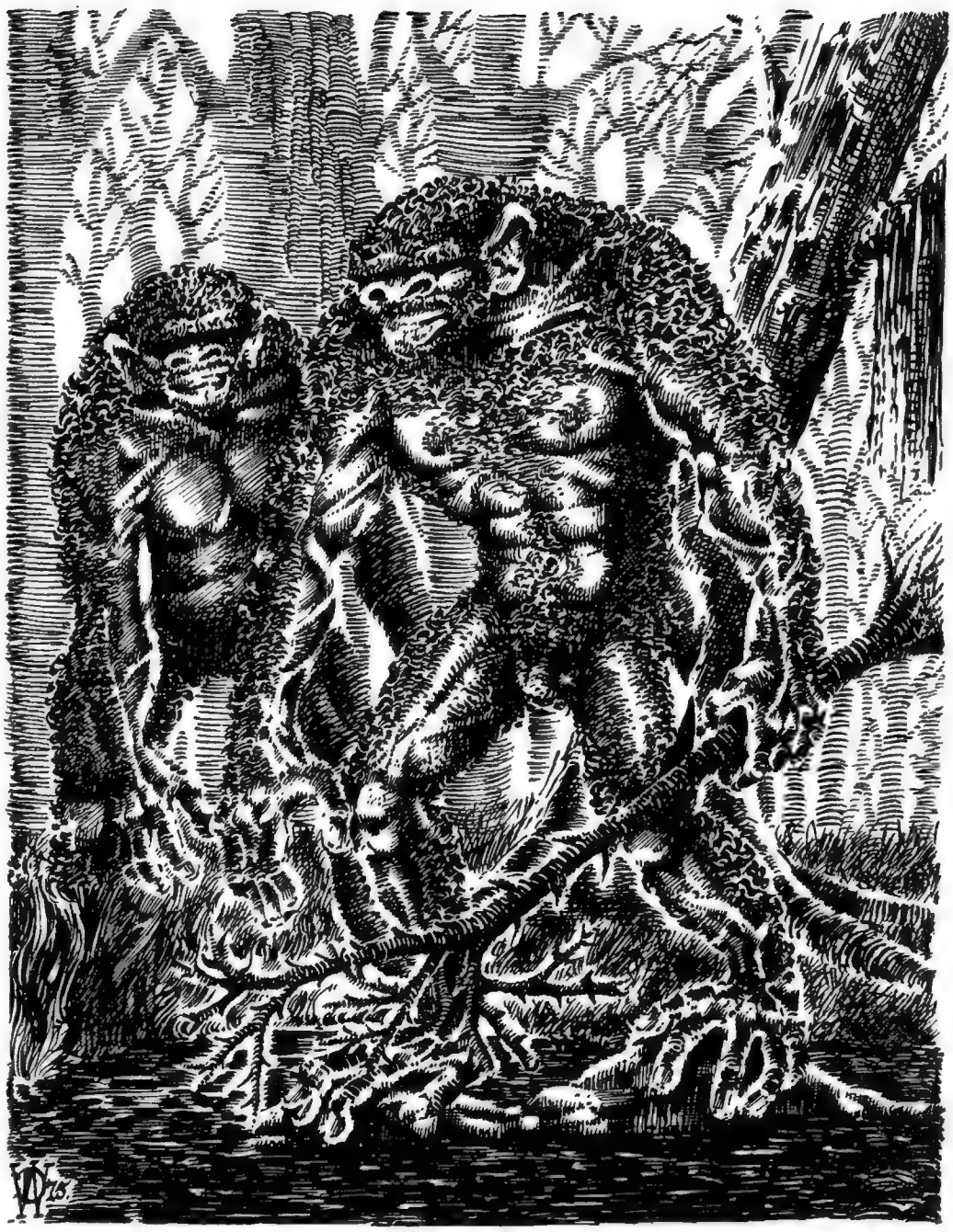
The feature I proposed in Bem #33 is generating interest already. Actually organizing a 'create a hero' feature for publication is beyond me until after my AA' levels and my European summer hitch-hike, but I would be grateful for any submissions over the next few months. I will emphasize again that I'm not acting as a link service to find artists for writers and writers for artists -- such productive fan partnerships will hopefully come out of the feature. What it will act as is a showcase for concepts and ideas--fan creations. It is up to fans who see a suitable partner or concept to work with to contact that partner themselves--the feature that I propose will allow these ideas and potential partners to be showcased and noticed, so that such communication will begin, OK? Sooo, start thinking about your heroes and villains, people, places, teams, and stories. Be adventurous...and everybody try, because you must all have your own good ideas. That means you! Send me visual and background details, biographies and even basic plotlines if you like (you will retain the copyright), and say if you would like to develop the idea with other fans or not. And include a tiny, very basic autobiography (age, name and address of course, interests and favourites in comics or music or whatever). Send them to me at the above address, but take your time and do your very, very best. I hope to show some pictures with each entry, so do your own -- I can polish them up, or draw them from your directions, if you would prefer that. (And whatever part I take in the presentation of your idea is subject to your approval at all times.)

There is the whole of this year yet, so you can send in as many ideas as you like as they occur to you...and remember, if you don't send anything, another good fanzine might never come to fruition... because you couldn't be bothered. I wait with bated breath. If you want confirmation of receipt (and a little reply), then enclose an SAE too. As central office, I couldn't afford to reply to you all otherwise, and I'd like to be able to. John Porter... you want artists because you've got ideas. Write in, laddie, canvas your ideas and let them come to you. And all you folk who are bemoaning the loss of comicdom's strapping, powerful ladies --if you miss them, make some of your own. Create, friends! /(And remember, send your creations to Ed, not to Bem, although you will certainly read more about Ed's project in future issues of Bem.)/

Richard Domar

I agree with Ed Hillyer. The School is for kids, and I'm not begrudging Sprite her place there. It's just the thought of a wimpy kid as a member of a strong team that makes me want to puke. So, without further ado let's change the subject to Ka-Zar. Of the three new titles of recent months, Dazzler and Moon Knight being the other two, Ka-Zar in just four issues has taken over the number two spot in my favourite reading order (I always read Jonah Hex first). The question is, why Ka-Zar. What is there about this comic that has suddenly made it such a favourite with me? I'll tell you. It's the script. It has everything from the serious to the downright ridiculous, and added to the superb art there's a perfect blend. An example to show you what I mean is when Ka-Zar is fighting Buth, and while he's pummelling the guy he's also telling him a parrot joke. This is a new Ka-Zar we're seeing. Not the bumbling fruitcake of the past, but someone else. Even having Shanna about makes for a much better comic. And what with all these superheroines being given a rough time, according to Miss Glancy and others, Shanna adds the right balance and, to my mind, adds a bit of glamour too. The way Brent Anderson draws her...well, if I had the choice I'd have her in preference over wimpy Sprite (even if she was old enough) any day. /(Ah, but would she have you? And even if she did think you kinda cute, what would Kev Plunder do?)/

Still on the subject of women in comics, poor old Peter Parker (yet again yawn yawn) seems to be left out of things as regards having a relationship with the opposite sex, while Johnny Storm has just been given the elbow, Vera (the Beast's girlfriend) is given poison, and Johnny Blaze arrived to find a potential relationship killed before it could start--the girl was killed. In just a couple of lines I've changed the subject, but I don't think anyone will mind if I talk in support of female heroes and characters. The recent trend of killing off the female sex is a little disturbing, and downright annoying, because there is no need for it. Sure superheroes are successful when they're male, and slugging it out and winning, but even the superheroine isn't a washout just because it is a female. The whole question boils down to attitudes, and unfortunately it is biased. While Ka-Zar has Shanna at least the flag is high, and let's hope she stays. However, Marvel are so geared to the male superhero that the female hero does not stand a chance. I just hope Shanna remains long enough for those Powers That Be to realise that the female is just as much a part of comics as the male.



Nige Squires

I wonder if I might use Reaction as a place to talk about something other than comics, but still within the general field of "fantasy". I have been meaning to do this since before Epic #3 came out, and after I read the article about "Dungeons and Dragons" in that magazine I decided to do it.

For the past year-and-a-half my comic collecting time has been largely taken up by another hobby. It is playing a game called "Dungeons & Dragons" (D+D for short). You may have seen the article in Epic #3; anyway, I want to try and win a few converts and get people interested in it. It seems to me that it would appeal to comic readers because of the common elements of fantasy, adventure, and fun. I certainly know of half-a-dozen or more D+D players in the University Wargames Club that read and collect comics. They are converts in the opposite direction, being D+D players initially.

There are two versions of D+D -- Basic and Advanced. I play the Advanced version ("AD+D"). It is not that difficult to begin playing the advanced version straight away; I managed it, and have never actually played Basic D+D. As far as content and ideas go, D+D draws largely upon J.R.R. Tolkein's works, but also upon many other fantasy writers--Howard, Lovecraft, Vance, Burroughs, Leiber, Moorcock, and de Camp, to name but a few.

D+D is a "fantasy rôle-playing" game, which means that the player takes on the rôle of a particular character, guiding and directing this character's actions and developing a personality for him or her. You can become the hero that you've always wanted to be: the swashbuckling Conan-type character, killing men and monsters, or the great wizard like Gandalf, or the master thief like the Gray Mouser, or indeed your own invented hero -- there is little opportunity for you to become Superman or the Hulk, though.

The character is created with six abilities-- strength, intelligence, wisdom, constitution, dexterity, and charisma. Each ability has a certain score, generated by those essential tools, dice. High scores are good, low ones bad. With the ability scores determined, the player chooses a race (human, dwarf, elf, etc), and a profession or "class" (fighter, magic user, cleric, or thief, basically), according to the rules; in keeping with the nature of dwarves in Tolkein's books, for example, dwarves are unmagical in nature and so can't become magic users or clerics. The class names speak for themselves largely, but I might say that clerics are priest-type spell casters, the agents of the Gods.

The last step in the preparation is to equip the character with relevant items such as weapons, armour, and food supplies. Now the player is ready to set off on the Great Adventure. The usual way of playing is to be a member of a party of characters exploring an underground complex of caves, rooms and corridors (a "dungeon"), designed by an overseer called the Referee or Dungeon Master ("DM"). He is in charge of the game, the supreme judge and arbiter, and it is in his world that you adventure. Each "campaign" has its own flavour-- the world might be like Newhon, or like Earth in medieval times, or like Middle Earth (Weirdworld would be a good one, too). You seek treasure (money and magic), monsters to kill, damsels in distress to aid; but you don't have to be a "goodie", you can be good, evil, or neutral. In D+D terms, Elric is evil. As a player you seek entertainment, excitement and fun in the game.

The game is quite complicated if you go into all the fine details, but the beginner does not need to do this. The fundamental rules are easy to grasp. Of course, at first you are floundering, somewhat:

"If we're going to fight the Pseudo-Dragon in that room, we could do with some "Keoghtom's Ointment", couldn't we?"

"Er...Yeah, I guess so." Thinks: "What the hell is Keoghtom's Ointment? What's a Pseudo-Dragon?"

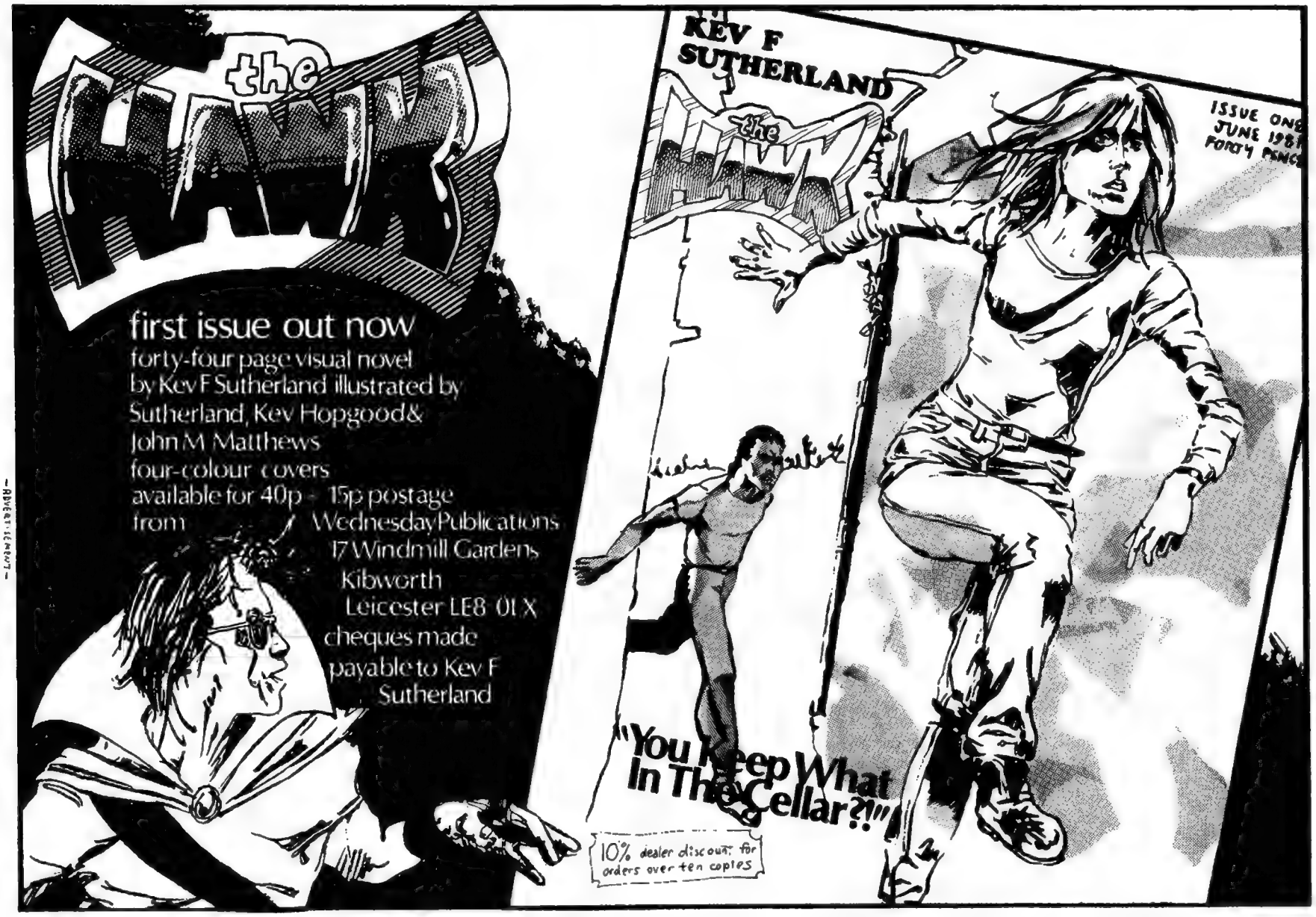
(The above relates to a creature with a poisonous sting, and a magical antidote to poison.)

However, with a little time, as with any game, the player will be sufficiently versed in the rules and experienced enough to begin to play without the mistakes and delays that we have all been through. He or she will develop his or her own style of play, and make new innovations in the game as the campaign grows and flourishes.

The game as a whole must be balanced, however. No parties of God-like characters, indestructable and all-powerful -- likewise, no "killer dungeons". The beginner must not be put off if his character is killed --remember Bêlit or Bucky, or Phoenix...even heroes and heroines die. Anyway, it can be fun getting killed! It's great fun misjudging the dimensions of a Fireball spell and nuking everyone in sight, including yourself! Survival at the start is low, and you often get killed (voice of experience), but never mind, just roll another character and start again--it's a bit like getting sent to jail in Monopoly.

Soon, one of your characters will make it over the first few hurdles, and will gradually gain more and more experience and become better and better at his or her profession, until you will truly have an Elric or a Conan--a powerful hero of your very own! You don't win at this game, you progress, indefinitely in theory. Characters are said to rise in experience levels, starting off at first level. A reasonably high level would be, as a sweeping generalization, 15th Level, and it is not achieved overnight! My highest-level character at the time of writing is only 6th, and I have had him for 18 months. However, my time is divided between designing, DMing (official term, not bad grammar), and playing, so it is not really 18 months' worth of effort. As a guide, one year of play would give you a 10th level character. (Another generalization!)

On the subject of time, if you get hooked like me,





you'd better be prepared for some very, very late nights. I've greeted the milkman as I've got back to my digs before now.

I have given the briefest of summaries of the game, and maybe not the best, but I have told you what I feel are the important points to get you interested (please?). Further information about the game, and others like it, can be obtained from any fantasy game shop. A useful address is:

Games Workshop Ltd
1, Dalling Road
Hammersmith
London W6 0JD
tel: (01) 741-3445

There is also Forever People in Bath and Bristol (D+D and comics together in the same shop! Too much! I really must make a pilgrimage down there sometime); here in Birmingham there's Dungeons & Starships just a few doors away from Andromeda Books on Summer Row (and anyone coming to Brum should also visit Nostalgia & Comics too, of course! I ought to get paid for all this advertising I'm doing...).

There is a useful article in issue 23 of WHITE DWARF giving an introduction to the game; this magazine is available from any fantasy gaming outlet, as are the four AD+D Manuals, only one of which is necessary for the player: "The Player's Handbook", which costs between £4.50 and £6 for the softback edition. Included in this are sections on character races, classes, and level abilities; spell tables and descriptions; equipment costs; weapons data; and information on adventuring. The other three volumes ("The Monster Manual", "The Dungeon Master's Guide", and "Deities and Demigods") are for the Dungeon Master to use.

I would also suggest that you contact your local wargames group (D+D is a "fringe" wargame). Most universities and colleges will have one, and perhaps some schools. Other groups will probably have notices in local libraries.

Well, I hope I've added a few followers to the cause, and opened up a whole new world for some of you. Perhaps a lot of you are actually D+D players; if you have played D+D I probably haven't told you anything you don't already know. Thanks for listening, anyway.

And now on the subject of comics (more or less), here's the latest output from the Random Thought Generator:

I didn't like the Celestials -- far too powerful... Why does everyone rave about the X-Men and Adam and the Ants?... Glad to read MTIO #77, where Ben is shown up as the true Megahero he really is... Like the Perez art on the New Teen Titans... Why are some back issues of Heavy Metal so expensive?... Wish Tizwas and Not the Nine O'Clock News were still on TV... Wish Ditko was still on Doctor Strange... Bring back Stalker and Shade... I'm afraid the FF have been going stale... But still glad to be an all-out Marvelite...

The Random Thought Generator goes on for hours but I'll have to cut it short now. I have to revise for my Finals. Now, that's an idea... I wonder if I could use the RTG in my exams. All I'd have to do is retune it from comics over to biology, and... (fades back into obscurity...)

Andrew Butchers

Bem is looking really quite pro now, what with full-colour covers and all (though the separations on 33 are a bit splodgy in places). Why, I remember when Bem looked like a fanzine...all small and cheap printing. My! You've come a long way since then.

Is this a new ploy in The Bem News Service, to keep refering to what you put in the previous instalment in MoI to persuade everyone to buy your assistant editor's material? /(You noticed! It also explains why I didn't go into more detail about some items in Bem, since I'd given fuller details in MoI.)/

Anyway, I enjoyed issue 33 greatly. HMS Conqueror is coming along nicely--though I would prefer a more dramatic storyline. You'd better chain that Harwood up, otherwise he'll be dragged off to "proper" comics! /(Dave does do the occasional strip for IPC, and indeed managed to sneak Fl'ff, Frank and the Captain into last year's VALIANT summer special, as bystanders in one panel. And if it's drama you want in the HMS Conqueror series, watch for "The Intruders" --it makes "Ben Hur" look like an epic...)/

I'm glad that there are others who thought Mind Wars very good (I'd assumed that they'd got the credits wrong on the 20th part, and it was Redondo all along). And on the subject of British comics, how about a bit more coverage of BATTLE? I mean, there's Tully & Cooper's "Johnny Red", Mills & Colquhoun's "Charley's War", Hebden & Cam Kennedy on "Fighting Mann", all of which are very good stories, as well as a reprint of Wagner's "Darkie's Mob". The best of BATTLE is easily better than the worst of 2000AD; and now they give credits -- a big move, really. I always think that 2000AD seemed to improve when they started giving credits!

You ask what we want in the Bem review section. I say definitely don't limit it to four-colour comics, or to a small number of reviewers. The diversity is good. I also would like to see a couple of differing reviews of the same mag, if you could get that together.

Do you know of any mail-order dealer who can supply copies of CEREBUS? /(Any good one, I'd hope; Bob Smart should be able to help, for example.)/

Andy Cottingham

Just perusing Bem 33... and one or two interesting thoughts spring to mind, like: amusing news, interesting interviews, and imperatively: where the hell's my letter, then? (Sorry, wasn't going to mention that.) And no way am I going to start that 'oh-ho, all big names in the lettercol again' thing. I mean, just because we're treated here to Brian Bolland, Maureen Glancy, Kathleen James (and column) etc etc... but I'm only kidding. After all, if elitism was the name of the game I'd be in immediately,

### Simon Russell

huh? Like: who hasn't heard of the Andy Cotting-ham, famed editor of Mach 3 Comic (and if you haven't, then there's yet another plug)?

No, farcically though, you prole-minded rodents, I have to admit I'm far from being the world's (or Peterborough's) greatest missive-scriber, yet when I dip feather into the Bic-blood and epistolarily cogitate on the controversial, thought-provoking essences of comix -- and in particular reviews of said pulp -- then one perhaps comes to expect, if one may allude so here, that one may initiate some form of personal reaction, if not a public airing. However, seeing as 'ow my letters is all ritt like that, then I don't suppose you even bothers to read between the lines. Well, 'nubs' to the lot of you, if one may be so vulgar.

But... Variety, as they say, is the spice of co-habitation, and so, one is nigh-defied to ask: why the perpetually conservative, maintain-the-status-quo type paeans in Reaction (and nothing by me?... sorry...)? Sarcasm indeed, but c'mon, Lock, who'd'ja vote for, aye? /(Why, the All-Night Party, of course.)/

Desperate resumé of last, unpublished, comments dept: the reviews in Bem -- and most other fanzines I've seen -- are pitifully short and insufficient. I don't see why I should back that up with the ol' specifics, just leaf through any 'review' in everyone's fave news 'zine and if you can't see what I'm droning on about, then renew your subscription to 'Fantasy Trader' (a fine body of men...).

Moreover... A few 'safe', popularly acceptable, oven-ready observations in easy-to-digest pieces (ahem): Bem is quite nice, Stan Lee is dead, a comic transcribing the greatest works of D.H. Lawrence could be brilliant, but fight-scenes go beyond such superficial drivel.

Actually... I don't see why any subject/theme/genre/anything whatsoever should not be explored through the medium of comics. Mike McMahon--in Masters of Infinity #7 -- claims otherwise (and maybe I'm sending this letter to the wrong place), but I have to say that this is more of the "pure, unadulterated" etcetera. I personally would buy a comic about the "human condition" far more readily than I would shell out shekels (bullpen bullshit lingo) on 'Superdog vs The Omniverse'. It is all totally and/or utterly a matter of how a strip is handled, the style of the artwork and so on, regardless of what the work is portraying. For 'human' stories, characterization and the like (not obviously visually exciting), cartoony, simplistic artwork seems to be the most suitable, as in "Contract With God" (Eisner), "Maus" (Art Spiegelman), or even, perhaps, fun stuff with serious angles like "Peanuts". Whatever, 'failed' experimentation is becoming more and more preferable to superhero antics; and that ballet-tighted strip in 'Masters of Infinity'-- a commercial-free fanzine -- is thereby proved farcical.

What have all these disjointed ramblings got in common, then? Answer: none of them will see print (they better, after that remark). Ah well, in the timeless words of that great philosopher, that guru of contemporary society, that awe-inspiring thoughtsmith of ongoing humanity, the inimitable Houdi-Elbow: "Such is life."

Oh yeah, local comix afficionado Simon Russell confided in me recently that he only writes letters to you in order to obtain free Bems. So you needn't print any more of his stuff.

/(Thanks for the tip-off; and next time you want to write a letter of comment about Masters of Infinity, why not send it to Dick Domar for a change? Ah well, at least you gave a good lead-in to our next correspondent...)/

### Howard P. Siegel

Nice cover, wasn't it? Despite the colouring being off, oh well ...Sadly, the article/interview that accompanied it was lacking in--er -- "oompf".

Nearly all interviews with British pros are very laid-back and uncontroversial. They're so...nice. Too polite. The Harlan Ellisons may be highly obnoxious, but they're a lot more fun to read. That's not to say you have to slag everyone off to make a good interview, but fence-sitting is boring. Bits of the interview were good--how Dave goes about his work, his opinions of the American quality of the Starlord/2000AD serials in albums, in full colour and carefully edited Invincible comes quickly to flow. Even black & white would be good. Look at the possibilities: Robo-Hunter, Stronty, Mind Wars, Blackhawk, Jude Doodar, Meltdown Man... It'll never happen, though.

Has anyone else noticed it--Gerry Conway that is. Something's wrong with this bloke ...he's writing good stuff. In Justice League he's doing strong dialogue and characterization, in Detective the stories are really good... Still, I'll never forgive him for what he (along with Jimmy Janes) has done to the Legion.

I think it's the "good artist = better story" formula; a lot of writers who do bad to indifferent stories (as has long since lost its with Mantlo) when working with a poor artist seem like a different person when they're teamed with a hot issue now. The original group peaked after they battled the Sentinals, then followed a path downward that led to semi-oblivion.

Disagreeing with K. Williams, I enjoyed MoKF 100 very much--but then, ignoring Godzilla and the Shoguns, Doug Moench is one of the best writers in comics. Strong on characterization, story, realism, and humour, he shows up the fan favourites like Chris Claremont and Bill Mantlo constantly.

Despite the bad script, dramatic character changes, and feeble plotting, Ka-Zar the Tame is almost enjoyable--there's something compelling about it. I suppose the changes were meant to keep Ka-Zar different to Warlord--they shouldn't have bothered.

I like the idea of fanzine team-ups, for Bem, it would be fair balance of the two 'zines would be essential, and then few fanzines would be compatible--Bem and Mol, being two very similar fanzines, to see work, but the others David Gryc mentions? I'm not so sure. Dave is right about the quality of Pat Broderick's work, of course; he's the best artist doing a regular strip right now (along with Perez and Miller). His work on Captain Marvel, though, was possibly even better -- with Doug Moench too, what a strip that was. Frank Miller may not be as well trained as Roger McKenzie in writing, but he seems to be at least as skillful --Daredevil is just as good as it has been since #158. Pity he's not doing The Defenders or Ghost Rider--they could do with some moody artwork. Of course, Klaus Janson too deserves a lot of credit for the quality of Daredevil; a really good inker, that bloke.

Staying with artists, now that Colan's leaving The Avengers, wouldn't it be good if Marvel could acquire the talents of James Sherman for the strip--remember his stuff on the Legion? Classic.

### Howard P. Siegel

Plaudits to my erudite colleague, the always-alert Kathy Glancy, who touched upon something in Bem #33--the almost unnoticed talents of E. Nelson Bridwell. "Bridey" is perhaps the closest thing to the perfect unturned professional. I spent a plane ride with ENB several years back. We were guests of honour at a Pittsburgh Comic Con along with Paul Levitz and Len Wein. Bridey was good--how Dave goes about his work, fairly bursting with sense of proportion and preciseness as he explained how he would handle Captain Marvel (Shazam) and the J.S.A. Why the DC editors keep the reins on this man is beyond me. Perhaps he is too good; or on a level that his publisher is afraid to turn to.

A short memo to K. Williams: A number of golden age magicians used gimmicks similar to both Green Lanterns. Ibis the created magical forms forces and weapons in the same way as the power rings. As for Kirby, he has had some fairly decent inkers in his time, beginning with Joe Simon. I repeat my oft-stated opinion that he can not draw human forms. And how many strips can survive on electronic machinery and ray blasts alone? Finally, Stan Lee some decades ago decided that comic books were not to be instruments of escapism. Real life conflicts would be the Marvel way.

Novel at first, that formula, replete with crossovers, reprints, & villains overshadowing heroes, has long since lost its vigour and impact. A case in point would be the X-Men, group peaked after they battled the Sentinals, then followed a path downward that led to semi-oblivion. proves it. All you afficionados can look forward to is a continual change in the creative team, each succeeding one having less talent than its predecessors. Stock ploys will be used, and all the hype will be rolled out, as was the case with the Marvels (Captain and Ms), Ant-Man, and the Sub-Mariner. I still wonder how and why the likes of Thor and The Fantastic Four have managed to survive over the years, having been so badly mistreated.

By the way, Martin, have you seen some of the excellent reviews Bem has gotten in American zines of late? To answer your closing remark in 33, yes, you must be doing something right! If I had one wish for Bem, it would be the attainment of economic parity to afford more reproductions. Wouldn't readers like to see some of the superheroes created by fan-turned-pro artists in our zines of the 60s? Or the writings of today's pros when they were fan columnists and editors? Would they be embarrassed to be reminded of what they once said about their current bosses! /(Sounds as if we could go into the blackmail business with extra pages for a lot of things...one day there, Howard! Bem could go Frank Miller may not be as well trained as Roger McKenzie in writing, perhaps...)/

### John Dalzell

Having subscribed to your wonderful publication for two years, I've decided to make a few comments and voice a few opinions. Firstly, I think it's necessary to categorize myself so that all your readers know what I am. I am an 18-year-old schoolboy, who spends almost all his money on comics, and unfortunately regards them almost as the only reason for

D.C. MARVEL AND WARREN ADVANCE IMPORTS, 1,000s OF BACK ISSUSE, UNDERGROUND COMIX MAGS AND BOOKS, E.C. REPRINTS. COME AND SEE US AT 140 WELLS RD, TOTTERDOWN BRISTOL BS4 2AQ OR SEND S.A.E. FOR FREE LISTS. WE ALSO BUY OLD COMICS.

further existence on Earth. With me, comics are an obsession in a way which for other readers seems to be compulsive, as far as I can see from letters in Reaction. I've been collecting since I could read (the first I bought were a Frank Robbins/Ross Andru Flash and a Gil Kane Green Lantern), yet I never lose any enthusiasm for the medium. I still go out every month and buy every comic, Marvel and DC, I can lay my hands on (excepting Shogun Warriors, Super Friends, and the odd war comic I don't care for). I was therefore shocked by Chris Ash's casual comment that JLA #190 was "the first regular-sized American comic I've bought for over a year." I find that incomprehensible. How can a comic fan not buy comics? Does he buy Heavy Metal and the Beano instead? How many other comic fans out there don't buy comics? Geez.

Secondly, the business about fan apathy. I am not a particularly social person myself; I don't go out looking for people to talk to, or write reams of letters to various mags expressing my beliefs (well, not usually; this letter is an exception). I don't call non-participation in fandom apathy. To me it is reading the comics that is important, and the rest is incidental. To be accused of apathy because you don't rabbit on about how often Neal Adams misses a deadline, or about Wolverine's sex life, in Reaction is grossly unfair to fans like me. You do not have to be part of active fandom to be a fan. I am quite content to read other people's hard work, both professional and amateur )like Bem), without thinking of myself as a vampire of some sort, living off someone else's creativity without putting anything into it myself. No way. /(And I'm quite content with the situation, too. Bem needs contributors, but subscribers, and shop purchasers, are important too --a zine like this couldn't survive without you.)/

Thirdly, I would like to indulge in some idle chit-chat, like that which usually fills Reaction. To Lilian Edwards with regard to Marshall Rogers on Dr Strange: have faith in the guy! He'll do a good job, leave after six issues, and be replaced by Frank Miller (an excellent artist and writer) or Mike Golden (who seems very enthusiastic about this book). The only pity is that Rogers could not bring Englehart with him. To Kathleen Glancy with regard to Chris Claremont: I agree. He is a hack. A good one, but still just a hack. To Colin Wilson on getting a regular assignment on 2000AD: Congrats, you're an excellent artist.

Lastly, I'd like to tell the editor (that's you, Martin) what to do with his magazine. Two interviews, as in this issue, is the perfect number -- only the Craig Russell one was far too short (and out-dated), and the Dave Gibbons one so long it got boring. Keep HMS Conqueror, it's looking up. Don't allow silly ads like the two pages in the middle. And lastly, print my letter. /(I didn't think that ad silly -- mylar bags are, it seems, the best type to put valuable comics in, and I certainly plan to put all my golden age comics into 'em. As for your last request, I'll think about it...)/

Christopher Melchert

I do wish I had more spare time, these days. I've started working full time at a Savings and Loan, y'see, and taking Calculus nights. I'm writing you now by aerogramme not to save postage, but to limit myself to one page. Maybe that's better, in any event. My previous long letter does not seem to have had the effect intended.

I should have learnt long ago you only defeat yourself by getting angry. I still maintain what I said (about Anderson and Infantino, about the more personal nature of Marvel superheroes, etc); but I expect K. Williams sounds much better. I'm sorry he was offended. I knew who Baily was (I kinda like the crude Spectre and Hourman reprints we've seen of his), but I mis-remembered his name as "Bailey". Williams doesn't even try to demonstrate that Anderson is any good, or Infantino not good (incidentally, my favourite Infantino is mid-sixties DETECTIVE, followed by FLASH--whereas his recent stuff for Marvel has been pretty bad); however, I offered no substantiating argument myself.

What I liked best in Bem #33 has nothing to do (on the face of it) with my letter--namely, Brian Bolland talking about why he likes Corben. It's a case well put; and if not what mainly interests me in comic art, I will now have more respect for those who do admire Corben for their sake. I never thought that the debate about gratuitous sex would lead to anything like this.

My letter does seem to have provoked a detailed defence of Russ Heath from Ed Hillyer -- the sort of thing I did hope to provoke. What I like about Kubert is less his "embellisher's flair" than his superb sense of composition, just rendering; whereas I feel incompetent to talk about rendering. I must admit that Russ Heath does the photographic effect better than anyone else I can think of, offhand. However, I've usually found it somewhat boring. I have a sort of artist-index of Marvel's 50's Brian, to, or write reams of letters to various includes mention of several Heath stories. I'll try to send Hillyer a copy.

Dean Smith

It has been some time since I wrote to Bem, partly because I feel that Bem has lost much of its bite and become increasingly bland. This is especially true of Reaction, which has become decidedly dull (come back, Cruden, all is forgiven!). But then, this could well be because of my own disinterest in recent comics. Take that new fan favourite, TEEN TITANS (specifically issues 3 and 4). Here Marv Wolfman has got the Titans under the hypnotic command of the Fearsome Five, so that they will fight the JLA, who are fighting the magicians who are trying to stop Trigon from destroying the world, which is what the Fearsome Five want, as they are allied to Trigon! That's not a plot you can 'drive a bus through', that's no plot at all! Neither is it the only case of utter stupidity I've come across in recent months. Either a number of today's scripters are as bored with the same old superhero shenanigans as I am, or they've got a huge side bet on to see who can put out the most illogical story and still not have the precious 'faans' complain! Reaction's not much better, either. Ivo Steyn, whose letters I usually enjoy, in #33 bemoans those people who refuse to discuss with him why comics can be considered art, on the grounds that "there is no arguing about taste" (only he put it in flash Latin). He then uses that very rationale to defend his taste in comics against points made by Lilian Edwards. Now I personally agree with Ivo that Steve Gerber's Headmen story in Defenders is one of the best ever published, but not just because I think it has a 'special magic'. If you can't put up, Ivo, for Christ's sake shut up!

I was going to end this letter with a word of praise for Graeme Bassett's second and third sentences as being an excellent parody of the subject's own convoluted style (I am right in thinking that, aren't I Graeme?), but that was before I saw Brian Bolland's letter.

At the risk of contradicting myself I'd say I agree with Brian's comments about 'Neverwhere' on the whole. Here holes and inconsistencies in the plot didn't worry me, but then, as Brian pointed out, the story was about so much more than the plot (unlike the aforementioned Teen Titans "Epic"). Talking about penis-movement-in-relation-to-body-movement, there is a nice example of this in the 3rd story, 4th page of the Heavy Metal 'Arzach' volume (not that I have a fixation about penis movements, except my own perhaps, just that it's this kind of detail that separates the artists from the stained glass school, you understand). Do you know that until I saw Brian's mention of Lovecraft it had escaped my attention that Uluhtc was

Dave Wishart

So, the 50 cent comic didn't last long. After the news that Mighty Marv are dropping yet another page, to make them much less value than DC, the latter of the big two are evening things out by going up to 60c a shot. It's enough to make you give up comics. If I hadn't already decided to specialize, I would now. /(I'd rather DC went up in price, adding two more pages of story (and thereby remaining better value than Marvel), than they followed Marvel down towards17 pages again!)/

Actually, despite the fact that it sounds like I'm moaning, there's a lot of stuff coming out that will be worth a look. How do you know what not to collect, if you never look in the first place? What with Arak and the new Justice Society, or whatever, plus James Bond, Dragonslayer, Lost Ark, the Supes film tie-ins, the X-Men Bizarre Adventures, it looks like an interesting summer, and new batch of stuff from NMP and Eclipse, more Canuck, and the smaller stuff like Elfquest, the Aardvark, and The First Kingdom.

Ka-Zar does seem to be perking up a bit; despite the fact that I don't see why we need another Savage Land, and the fact that I wasn't much impressed with issue 1, the next one I have, 3 (though my book says I've ordered 2), is much better. While I remember, a quick plug... There's a comic stall open in Cardiff in the Hayes, two doors down from the Sex shop (everyone knows where that is), so anyone in the Cardiff area drop in. It's open on Thursdays & Saturdays, and has cheap back issues (including rare stuff, Conan #1--mint was there last Saturday, but not for long), and imports quicker than the London shops. Say hello and have a chat with Dave and Pete, who are also SF buffs, as well as being partial to DC.

Good to see old Thundermole back. But I haven't figured out what the "Epsilon" thingy is from your strip. Must be slowing up in my old age. /(Since you're not a Conqueror crew member, I'm not surprised. Luckily, Fl'ff managed to work out what was required, though.)/

I've just read "Golem 100" by Alfred Bester, which includes some 'comic' pages. Not quite as good as "Tiger, Tiger" /(alias "The Stars My Destination")/ or "The Demolished Man". I think it was let down by the end, which was unexpected, not up to the standard of the first three-quarters, and which demands a sequel -- which Bester won't do, or course.

Looking at Reaction (longer letter

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columns are ok by me), swipe-spotters may look at WARLORD. The recent "Berserker" cover was a rip-off of Ka-Zar whomping some beastmen in an Adams X-Men.

Hi to Dick Domar and Toe.

Concerning my suggestion for a photo-separation job for the cover, how about a Christmas special for a pound, £1.50, or whatever? The stuff you could put in! A Bolton one-pager, a huge Reaction, a cover gallery of classic covers, a colour centre-spread (the cover A3 without type?)...

/(A fine idea. D'you think you could lend me £1200 or so, for the printing costs, Dave? I'd let you have it back the minute that the issue sold out!)/

A thought just occurred...John Porter's saying that Robin seems to be in his early twenties in the Titans. It's been established that he <u>will</u> change his costume, and wear "long underwear" (Batman ≠300); how about a switch now?

I reserve judgement on the X-Men until I've seen more, but sadly Cockrum's art isn't close to Byrne's. It isn't as good as the first batch that he did. I still like the comic, though. DD, Iron Man, and MK are my first reads from Marv. I suppose the FF when Byrne starts, and of course Rogers on ol' Doc, that's something to look forward to. It's a pity Perez can't clone himself. Imagine him doing the Titans, JLA, X-Men and Avengers...

I find that I like Spider-Woman...Leihaholarola's art is something to behold, even when it's inked by 103 different left hands. Siryn, eh... For future issues, how about Ms Jugsanautte, Colossess, Ant-Girl.....(heh heh heh)...

Ain't the inking on Moon Knight ≠8 the pits?

Cheer up, Ms Edwards; there's the Titans, Iron Man, DD, X-Men, JLA, Doc Strange, Lethal Ladies, Paradox, Flash, Firestorm, Garcia Lopez, Daily Strips (did you see the 'Four-D Jones' quickie? Merveille!)...

Kathleen Glancy

I was agreeably surprised to see a newsbill reading 'Lock To Get George Cross' the other day -- it looked as if the Establishment had finally realised the sort of courage it took to produce Bem. However, it turned out to be P.C. Trevor Lock they meant (and he's only getting the George <u>Medal</u>, not the Cross), so better luck next time.

Speaking of Bem, the latest issue was particularly rich in good covers for the Caption Game. Daredevil and Ka-Zar have both a musical bent--Kevin is crooning 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I Seen', while Matt is warbling '...you put your right leg in, and you shake it all about ...' The FF are being pursued by the VAT man, the Avengers by Michael Fish. Star-Lord is thinking 'I wish I'd never agreed to help out on the switchboard while the telephonist had her lunch', and Thor is thinking 'Would that I had not tried to help Star-Lord'. /(And Ed Sillyer suggests that the Master of Kung Fu cover could benefit from a strategically placed 'Pieces of Eight! AWK!' -- or perhaps Shang is taking up amateur dentistry. 'Ah so, Mister Reston, it looks like you need a few fillings along the top there.' And he thinks Thor may well be saying 'Damn Italian food'. Myself, I suspect Wonder Woman's saying 'Not on our first date...')/

But the news -- oh God. An easily merchandisable symbol for Wonder Woman -- the mind boggles. I would have thought this was an April Fool joke, but then I would have thought the same of the new Avengers line-up, and it seems that's true enough. Worse, there is a rumour that the...the...D*****R... Let us all pray, or clap our hands, or hire a hit-man to off Shooter before it's too late, or <u>something</u>.

I don't follow Dick Domar's argument at all. Let me try applying his logic to his own case. Dick, you smoke, yes? Now, suppose that inhaling nicotine ceased suddenly to give you any pleasure -- say because of a change in your metabolism--and instead made you feel faintly nauseous. Would you <u>then</u> continue to smoke, just so you'd still be part of the smokers' 'group'? That does, in effect, seem to be what you recommend I should do -- stay with a group devoted to an activity that no longer gives me pleasure.

Two final points. Miss Padgett. I do <u>not</u> 'snikkk'. Never. In dire circumstances, I would put a half-brick in my handbag and 'splatttt'. And Martin--for God's sake call the Superswipe Revenge Squad home. Have you any idea how much (and <u>what</u>) they eat? The owners and staff of the SF Bookshop (at Crosscauseway just down the road from the Odeon--a very respectable district, Mr Hillyer --just give me the £5 next time I'm in, boys) will protect me from all harm. They <u>have</u> to, or bang goes their profit margin. /(Of course I know what the Squad eats; why d'you think I was glad to send them away from Worcester? The farmers round here were getting suspicious!)/

Rai Davies

About a year ago, I began to feel a little disquieted, with respect to the "direction", "movement", and "explosion" attitude permeating Marvel. Six months later of writing (behind Iron Man, Daredevil, and the Teen Titans). But when I wrote about them so critically, what I was trying to do <u>exactly</u> was to "keep things in perspective". Over the last few years, the X-Men have received a vast amount of space in nearly all the mainstream fanzines, and especially in that gauge of popular taste, Reaction; they have garnered innumerable Eagle Awards, in the face of some work generally acknowledged to be excellent; they are the only comic title to have its own fan club & exclusive fanzine. In the light of all this, one should expect the comic's quality to be a quantum leap above all its rivals, and, moreover, to remain consistently at that level. All I was trying to show was that, set against these rigorous standards, the X-Men just do <u>not</u> deserve the overkill praise they have been accorded. "Special magic" was perhaps a bad phrase -- all I meant by it was the kind of objectively determined excellence I've just described (and incidentally I'm crazy about Gerber's "Headmen" issues too). And nothing is wrong with "vast compulsiveness" -- but the point I was trying to get over, and still stick to, is that just because you're dying for the next issue to come out is <u>not</u> synonymous with X-Men being the best comic on the market, any more than "Dallas" is the best series on television. As for "justifying" my dislike, which you seem to take exception to, wouldn't you rather I did that (thereby allowing you to pick holes in my arguments) than simply screamed abuse? I did admittedly go out of my way in that letter to account for all my statements, since earlier in it I had accused someone else of making statements with no back-up, and didn't want to be accused of hypocrisy--but personally I've always been annoyed by bare mentions of approval or distaste, and I feel that the more objectively verifiable justifications there are for an expressed opinion (especially of a new and unversed fan like myself), the more value it has, and the more constructive the criticism based on it will be.

Next! Rob Hansen's letter is not so easy to answer, because as Steve Green points out there are basic differences of terminology here--not in this case as to the meaning of 'fan', but as to the difference between "fan" and "faan" (a subtle distinction, you can appreciate). Faans, as I see them (and as the source you quote seems to imply), are people who have broken all ties with the subject which introduced them to fandom (comics, sf, whatever), and are now entirely occupied with writing about their own and their friends' activities, and talking to said friends at conventions, in pubs, etc. These are <u>not</u> the same people who run the BSFA, which is very solidly associated with science fiction--nor did they run at least <u>one</u> Eastercon, Albacon in 1980, since I am personally acquainted with the committee of that convention and know that they have not entirely succumbed yet to the incestuous delights of exchanging identical personalzines and conreps... Rob on the other hand defines 'faans' as anyone who does anything in fandom rather than simply sitting back and reading fanzines/enjoying conventions as they turn up. Well, Rob, I have been on the committee for two conventions, taken part in an excessively silly Star Wars spoof, lately become Vice-President of the Glasgow Univ SF Society, and contributed to the fanzine said society will shortly be issuing--am I a faan? Of course not. The truth is, a faan is someone who knows other faans very well, either personally or through letters printed in fannish zines, especially someone on the Twll-Ddu mailing list. (There in a nutshell is the difference between comics fandom and sf fannish fandom --while comicdom's best zine is also its most widely distributed, the best sf zine is available only on the whim of its editor to the elite few.)

To get back to your letter a little, it's not the "childishness" of faans which offends me, but the unnecessary bitchiness as exemplified by your "kill-the-f***ers" approach to fnz reviewing (see, I know fanspeak too)--I see no reason to pour

Lilian Edwards

Well, thank God, after over a year of writing to Bem I've finally said something stimulating enough to get people disagreeing with me. To Ivo Steyn: the first thing I'd like to say is that I <u>do</u> like the X-Men; they are perhaps my 4th

excessive vitriol on the first issue of a fanzine, as opposed to helpfully pointing out its flaws, as the likes of Joe Nicholas delight in doing. And to say that you are "bewildered" at accusations of elitism is arrant nonsense; the worst swearword in sf fandom is "greasy neo", and the Lord knows how you stop being one. Oh well, there goes my chance to take fandom by storm at Yorcon (sigh)...incidentally, anyone who sees me at Yorcon, please say Hi.

A few lighter comments before I go, to stop this letter seeming unbearably petty. Can someone please either bribe or sponsor Graeme Bassett into writing a letter every issue, because with the state of Britain today (she said in her best Maggie Thatcher voice) he's the only thing this side of Clive James /(not sure on the hand-writing there -- it might be Clive Jenkins?)/ that makes me laugh. And still in Reaction, isn't it a strange coincidence that nearly all the people John Green cited as overexposed in Bem-32 had letters printed in Bem-33. Ooh, you are awful, Martin... /(Well, it did make a handy checklist... (But you like me?))/

Beautiful cover by Dave Gibbons (will someone tell me if he is Dave Harwood or not, please!), and almost as striking is the illo of Starfire on page 25. Just to show I don't mind conforming to the crowd, I love the new Titans as well, and the thought of what this newly invigorated Wolfman might do in collaboration with Colan at DC is very interesting. /(Unless someone has been hiring actors to mislead me, the two Daves are entirely different people. See Bem-32, page 10 panel 2, for the likeness of Dave the H, just behind Brian Bolland--a far from flattering picture of DG led off the interview, of course.)/

Can I just make one last point about the X-Men before I vow never to talk about them again? No-one seems to have noticed yet another Claremont Continuity Conundrum which reared its head in the latest Annual, with the revelation that Kurt's girlfriend Amanda is really his adoptive sister Jimaine, only masquerading as a civilian to get near him. If that's so, then why (in MTU 89) does she think (think, not say, therefore she's not acting) that she must remember her air stewardess training! The answer of course is that Chris Claremont hadn't thought up her (highly unlikely) origin at that time; but that's no excuse. Over to you, Kath.

Mark Day

Question: to get your letter printed in Bem?

Answer: write controversial (rude) things, and insult other fans, or become a member of the "inner circle of fans" and have a letter printed every issue instantly. Martin, do you even read letters by Maureen James, Lilian Edwards & co, and decide on literary merit whether they are to be published? I doubt it. If I want my views printed must I start my own zine? There are a lot of people like me who cannot do this and rely on established zines; I know I have no right to demand this, but how about a bit of consideration for us? /(It's very flattering that you want to see your letters in Bem, but there isn't room for every letter. Of course they're all read, as they come in, and I try to use the ones with something to say, to contribute...and ones that entertain, inform, annoy even. But in the end, the space is full; there's a limit to the pages that can be used for letters. If you want to contribute to fanzines, don't limit yourself to Bem--spread yourself around!)/

And thus saying the kid, not even out of school and on the same continent as her, dares to criticize Kathleen Glancy. When she starts asking why Sprite is in the X-Men, has she ever stopped to think about it? As comics become more sophisticated, so have the stereotype "heroes with problems", to the extent that only people who can associate with them are adults, and the Titans and the Legion of Super-Heroes might as well be the "in their twenties" Titans etc. Admittedly Sprite is not perfect, but though I cannot relate to alcohol, drugs etc, I can recognize a messy room (X-Men #129) --though if Sprite is some kind of genius, why a pin-up of nauseating Lief Garret? (Ah, but a pin-up of supergroup Kiss; genius after all.) She criticizes writers for churning out mindless rubbish when they aim at a younger audience, but when someone brings out the closest thing yet to a young hero, she mauls it without questioning motives. Make your mind up, Kath.

This adult-identification thing is another point Bem falls down on. I am sure I'm not the only person reading Bem who cannot go to the local shop to pick up a copy of Neverwhere, Heavy Metal, Detectives Inc, etc. When an article appears in Bem, either you forget this fact, or you do not give a... /(Good point. However, the other point of view is that, if you can't pop in to Dark They Were every week, and buy Bem by post, you may well want to buy 'Stewart the Rat' by post too. You're unable to look at a copy before you buy, so you're very glad to read what Nige Edwards thinks of it, to help you to make up your mind--and perhaps save you from paying £3.50 for something you wouldn't enjoy. I am aware that Bem hasn't carried enough articles on Marvel lately--would somebody like to do one, or perhaps suggest some suitable subjects? Anyway, should STARBURST stop covering 'X' rated films because some of its readers can't get in to see them? Okay, back to you, Mark...)/

Has anyone ever wondered why, in the light of the more realistic and detailed art of the likes of Adams, Byrne etc, how Kirby and Ditko caught on? I'm not being nasty, I'm just curious; not being around at the time, it seems odd to me. (That's another thing missing from Reaction, some more constructive help and advice from older fans for young fans instead of the usual "I think these little creeps are a bunch of..." attitude; though this can only happen if you print letters from outside the "inner circle" of fans.) Though I think the reprints of the early stuff are not bad, Ditko's recent work looks weak to me, and recent Kirby work is to me grotesque and unappealing. /(Well, Kirby and Ditko caught on before Adams and Byrne came along, as I'm sure oldtimers like Keith Williams would tell us; whatever the merits of their recent work, they (with Stan Lee) were the founders of Marvel as we know it, and a lot of people would say Ditko's 38-issue run of Spider-Man was far better than any more recent sequence -- ditto for Kirby's work on the FF. When I started collecting comics ten years ago, Kirby's "Fourth World" set of titles at DC was causing much excitement; check out BEST OF DC DIGEST #19 in a few months, which should reprint some of the original New Gods stories. Both Byrne and Adams have done fine work -- but when Adams (and, later, Byrne) came along, Ditko and Kirby were already well established.)/

Please tell Kathleen Glancy that I don't believe Scotland looks like Marvel thinks it does either, and I shall prove this by hacking my way through jungles of mile-high heather and thistles, and single-handedly braving wild rabid haggises, to smash her face in if she criticizes Sprite again. /(Be sure to make out your will first...and watch out for that half-brick! But welcome to the "inner circle"; your secret decoder ring and pass-card to all major fanzines' lettercolumns are enclosed. Please send the £25 registration fee as soon as possible, and indicate whether the full-colour signed photo should be of Kathleen Glancy, Lilian Edwards, or Graeme Bassett.)/

Howard Well, Stangroom a nice try but Bem-33 arrived too early to hit April 1st, cooking up the timing of the April Fool's prank. Colan at DC? Almost all of the interesting Avengers ditched? It can't really be happening--can it?

One thing I can't resist is an attack --Listen up, Mr Ash. While I'd be the last to deny that I was "slagging off" Conway in that review--it's one of my favourite pastimes, & usually he deserves nothing better--you're misinterpreting my reason for so doing. I've nothing against "experiment" per se, but I meant to imply that that particular ish of DCCP was cloaking several hoary old clichés, foremost amongst them Conway's neanderthal notions about women, under a veneer of apparent "experimentation". The same old bullshit, in effect, but sugar-coated. (And how's that for a truly repulsive metaphor?)

Having said that, even I'm forced to admit that Conway doesn't get it wrong quite all the time. I, too, remember that JLA/JSA team-up in which Mr T. bought it with affection (but for God's sake don't tell Kath G that; you'll ruin my image); I just wish he'd pull himself out of the mire a bit more often, that's all...like more than once or twice in a career.

Err...were Ben Crozier and I reading the same edition of Dazzler #2? Apart from the 'heroine' being a wishy-washy whiner (in the best tradition of Sue Richards), this book was guilty of the character assassination of Marvel's oldest & classiest villainess, as DeFalco has her battle two dozen or more super-heroes because she failed an audition as a disco singer? Balls. If she'd been trying her usual universe-destroying gig, ok, but as it was presented, she came across as childish and petty, and whatever else 'Chanty is, she's never been that before. Move over, Ger...somebody else has appeared with as much contempt as you for both previously established characterizations and women in general. (All part of the conspiracy against women, of course. Hey Kath, have you caught Conway's devaluation of Zatanna? And Storm seems to "burn out" a lot quicker than she used to, these days.)

Returning, albeit reluctantly, to Dazzler: Okay, Ben, the art was good (touch of the Walt Simonsons in places, yes?), but "all that's good in comics scripting and pacing"? By no means. I'll stick to "Dial H for Hamsters"...

Point of information for Mr Porter; for the record, Iron Man became a supertype at least partly for vengeance on the Communists who caused his afflictions, and Ant-Man & the Wasp were both doing the old "vengeance for murdered loved ones" routine, i.e. Hank's first wife Maria Trovaya and Jan's Dad, Professor Vernon Van Dyne. All of which are adequate motivations, I feel...or at least as adequate as Super', Bats', etc...

Cast my vote for Bemuscene remaining its own sweet self, by the way. I certainly prefer it to some of your interviews -- the Dave Gibbons one was interesting, but Craig R's rantings were strictly from Snore City, Arizona... (Oh, dear. I must stop using Perrinisms, it dates me...) And the "Mind Wars" articlette was, well, less than 100% brilliant. The series definitely deserves more critical acclaim, but this all seemed a bit pointless. I assume it was done primarily for Bem's US readership? I noticed R. Jennings, in a Bem review for Comics Feature, pontificating about how "absurd" it was that UK comics fanzines paid so little attention to native product. He clearly has no idea of how tiny a proportion of the UK comics deserve the attention of anyone older than 3. Sad...

/(The review deadline for Bem-35 is August 8th; fewer & longer, please!)/

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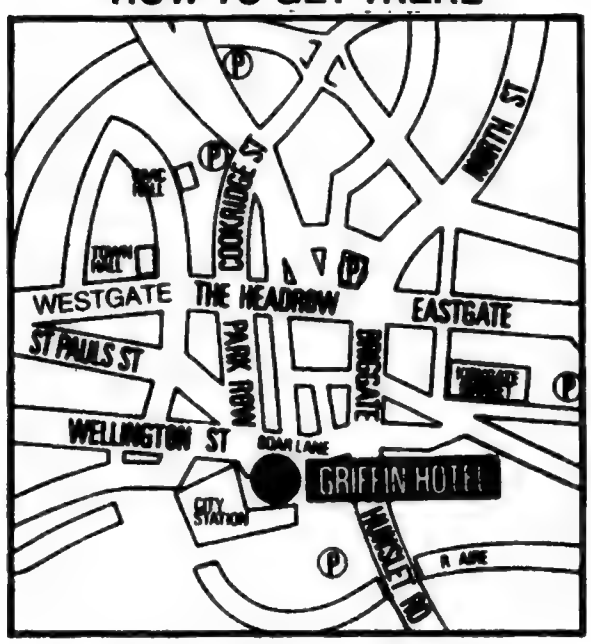


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David Gryc

You'd like some more B7 info? Well, okay. The new series of Blake's 7 will hopefully start on either the 7th or 8th of September; all the original cast have signed for the new series except Jan Chappell, Cally will be "killed off" in the first episode and a new character, Sulin, played by Glennys Barber will be introduced. Plans for the new series include establishing Avon as the undisputed leader of the group, with Tarrant as his able lieutenant, and developing the character of Dayna more than in the last series. Tanith Lee will be writing an episode for the latter half of the series -- remember "Sarcophagus"?

Also watch out for a guest appearance by Janet Lees-Price (otherwise known as Mrs Paul Darrow); a new computer called 'Slave' (voice by Peter Tuddenham); new programme titles; a sinister head of Federation Security, called Sleath; better special effects; more realistic costumes & sets; re-orchestrated theme music (to be released as a BBC record); and also a planetary base with an ops room, and a crew room where our heroes get to eat real food!

If you want to know where I get it from, well there are two fandoms, aren't there. /(A conservative estimate, that...)/

After reading Kathleen's letter, I can only assume she has finally lost <u>all</u> of her marbles --anyone who thinks Chris is trying to do a "Blue Lagoon" scene must be mad. After reading X-Men ≠147 I can see what Mr Claremont has in store for those two. They'll be captured by whoever is on that mysterious (hah!) floating isle (and it most certainly looks like a Magneto island to me!), and probably will have to be rescued by the other X-Men. And this of course will lead to an all-out fight with Magneto for the double-length 150th issue.

The DC mini-series are still going strong. Having read the latest, TALES OF THE GREEN LANTERN CORPS, I must say it's the best one of the lot so far; being a comparative newcomer to Green Lantern it's been a great help in the history of GL, and Bolland is doing some really excellent covers. Wonder if he'll do any for Marvel at all? How about an interview with Brian sometime, Martin? /(Masters of Infinity ≠2 had a good interview with him, David, which rules out another for a while; we're doing our best to bring you his words and pictures though, whenever possible.)/

The last issue of MAN-THING was different, to say the least--apart from Danny Fingeroth writing all over the bloody cover. I think, as the old bloke at the end said, that Chris must have been on a Gerber trip for most of the issue. And Mayerik treated us to pictures of Chris, Jim, Louise and Danny... It amazes me that a comic always goes out with a great story and resurfaces with an average one, and only lives up to its past glory near the end.

John P. Birtles

Firstly, I would like to point out to Lilian Edwards that not all the comics news at the moment is depressing. Bizarre Adventures ≠27 is now an all X-Men issue, and "Holocaust" by Neal Adams is scheduled for Epic ≠7. I advise all readers to buy Madame Xanadu ≠1, which not only has the 25-page Steve Englehart/Marshall Rogers story but also a back-up story drawn by Brian Bolland and a glossy centre-spread by Mike Kaluta. On the other hand, DC comics are going up to 60 cents. And, looking at some of the panels in the new Superman/Spider-Man sequel, I don't think many DC fans will be happy with the way John Buscema's drawn Supes.

Actually, I'm only writing this letter as a result of Rob Hansen's comments that a fan is someone who actively takes an interest in fandom; as yet, I have not. I thought it was about time I did something about it.

I may as well add my comments on the New Teen Titans -- everybody else has. The new Titans are a vast improvement on the old ones. In Wolfman and Perez we have a great partnership. Marv Wolfman is allowing the characters to develop, and George Perez draws with lots and lots of enthusiasm. It's great.

Personally, I fully agree with Ed Hillyer. A page or two concentrating on the creations of fans is a splendid idea, especially as I do have the capacity to draw rather well...

I feel it is my duty to defend Moon Knight --the comic I think has the potential to go a long way. How can it go wrong, under the eyes of Doug Moench and Bill Sienkiewicz. Although some people have not greeted his style with open arms, perhaps Sienkiewicz will soon shake off the Adams influence, and go on to develop his own style. The splash page of the first issue was so reminiscent of Neal Adams that I looked at it in awe. The artwork overall was rather crude, but with the help of a good inker such as Klaus Janson the book could soar to new heights.

This can also be said of Ka-Zar, the first issue of which was better than I had expected. With a little encouragement and a bit more enthusiasm, this comic could become one of Marvel's better titles.

It has also come to my attention, as well as David Gryc's, that Sal Buscema is lacking, artwise. He's nowhere near the artist he was in the late '60's. His work on The Avengers was some of the best, but now he has taken The Incredible Hulk to new depths. The same cannot be said of The Micronauts, which is steadily turning out good stories. Unlike most of fandom, I prefer the under-rated Danny Bulanadi to Armando Gil as inker on this book.

Although Kathleen Glancy makes some interesting points about the conspiracy against women, I think she's making a mountain out of a molehill, and so I tend to ignore it.

Now on to Bem itself. A nice cover by Dave Gibbons, and a very interesting interview. You asked us about Bemuscene, and I think you should adopt a system similar to that of Masters of Infinity, where readers can send in detailed reviews themselves. Talking of Bemuscene, I thought K. Williams was very unfair on the Master of Kung Fu anniversary issue. It was an enjoyable read, and it took me back to the days of Paul Gulacy. I, like many others, am also in favour of an annual team-up with some other fanzine.

I don't need to say anything about the X-Men, as everything has already been said, except that I also am in favour of Kitty Pryde. Claremont has chosen a difficult but exciting character to write about, and I think it's about time some more pupils were at least found -- there must be some around.

You may think I'm not very good at writing letters, but this is my first to any fanzine, so please print it.

I would also like to thank Richard Domar for telling us about Marvel's new numbering system. Can they be serious? /(Well, a more relevant question is, was Dick serious? From the number of fans who were willing to believe Dick's sarcastic little satire, I'm wondering what I could get away with in the Bem News Service! And that ends Reaction for another two months; my apologies to those whose LoCs couldn't be fitted in, including Rob Hansen, Stephen McGonagle, Tom Abell, Nick Hay, Paul Strout, Tim Bateman, Vince Weldon...-Martin)/

# ISLANDERS ARE ALWAYS MORE TREACHEROUS

BY GRAEME BASSETT

The word "spy" is generally considered a synonym for Secret Agent, although hair-splitters will insist that a spy is an undercover operative whose task is the acquisition of information. A Secret Agent, whether he works for British Intelligence (SIS/MI6, or since 1965 DI6) or Counter Intelligence (MI/DI5), is basically a detective.

Although spies have been portrayed in all the media, I'm constantly disappointed by their comic-book track record. There have been some ludicrous films about spies... Does anyone remember Tom Adams in the "Charles Vine" thrillers? Somehow, even LICENSED TO KILL's homicidal transvestite, Col. Hishi, and the teaser for WHERE THE BULLETS FLY with an assault on Westminster being foiled by "Fawkes...Guy Fawkes' seem more respectable than IPC's John Havoc, ex-pilot blackmailed into danger by the faceless spy with the old school tie.

Now why is it that a detective with a license to cause mayhem, a formula which initially appears tailor-made for the lowbrow world of comics, should fail so miserably in comparison to other media?

TV, I should point out, has been responsible for a wide range of agents, from the enigmatic Smiley in TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY to the dogmatic Cowley in THE PROFESSIONALS, but standing apart from the crowd is James Mitchell's CALLAN, created in 1968 for ITV and even by today's standards quite pessimistic. The series had as its background a "Section" licensed to operate inside or outside the UK. Despite the immense popularity of the show, it had no detectable influence on comics of the period. VALIANT was still publishing HOUSE OF DOLLMAN, featuring a deranged ventriloquist and his robot dolls, and THE STEEL CLAW, an often-invisible agent with a metal hand. Both series used the secret service as an entrée to SF-orientated romps.

It wasn't until 1976's ACTION that a Callan-style strip appeared. Entitled DREDGER OF DI6, it followed the format of the show whilst making some character alterations. Callan, as played by Edward Woodward, was ethical, conscientious, and "jelly inside". His sidekick, Toby Meres (Anthony Valentine) was a nut, albeit a charming one. The comic reversed all that, leaving the ethics to Old Etonian Breed and the homicide to the working class Dredger. The strip had little to recommend it in background detail (one episode even cast DI6 and SIS as separate entities), and the highlight of each story was the moment when Dredger would pull his latest dastardly stroke, breaking down comic-book taboos along with the necks and noses.

The school of spy-fiction represented by THE PRISONER will probably always favour television. Philip Mackie's COVER took the theme of deception even further than LeCarré, since no-one, not even the hero, could be trusted by the viewer. The lack of violence would probably ban COVER from the comic-book pages, while the lack of conventional reference points would make it difficult to adapt to a daily newspaper strip. Ironically, while comics are in theory the best medium in which to play mind-games (unlike a film, or tape, the comic page is static, so the viewer can take his time over a tricky sentence, and refer back to a character's previous statement at leisure), the writers seem most reluctant to step away from the Bulldog Drummond school. This may be because they feel comics are for kids, or an emphasis on thought over action is not "Good Comics", or they may just feel that the reader isn't willing to devote much energy to reading a comic.

Another recent ITV series is Ian MacKintosh's THE SANDBAGGERS. Dealing with the SIS's Special Section, the success of the programme is due in no small part to the character of Burnside, a compelling mixture of weakness and ruthlessness who finally puts paid to the creaking notion of faceless colonial types cheerily authorising "hits" at the drop of a hat. Since an assassination can only be sanctioned by the Prime Minister, the matter of murder is given a great deal more discussion than is usual in the genre. The humour is subtle and ironic, and of course MacKintosh is an excellent thriller writer, always one step ahead of his audience, deftly pulling the strings.

The Sandbaggers probably once employed James Bond. He shares an office with two chums (006 and 008), spends most of his time reading reports, and, with the exception of MOONRAKER (a special case), operates outside Britain. Of course, Bond is well paid, whilst Willie Caine complains "I'm James Bond. And I earn less than an assistant undersecretary at the foreign office." But that's inflation for you.

Bond's first appearance in the John McClusky/Henry Gammadge Express Newspapers adaptation of LIVE AND LET DIE (1957) borrows the pose of the archetypal "Man From The Ministry", bowler hat and all. McClusky's Bond manages to anticipate Connery in the rugged build and looks, whilst staying faithful to Fleming with the scar, and "comma of black hair falling over the forehead." Though dialogue and events are compressed, the style remains faithful to Fleming. As an example, the earliest interrogation scene loses some of the character embroiderment, such as Felix establishing a rapport with his captor through Jazz, and Mr Big's sinister "Which finger do you use the least, Mr Bond?" But 007 still gets his little finger snapped (what a thing for Lord Beaverbrook to inflict upon the nation's breakfast tables), and it's noticeable that comic strip heroes were still human enough in those days to pass out when the pain became too great.

When Jim Lawrence & Larry Horak took over in 1965, there was already a set formula for the Bond strip, and it may surprise those who only know Lawrence from "Captain Britain" that, although Bond was updated, some of his adventures were quite good.

One of the last Express strips, WHEN THE WIZARD AWAKES, pulls out all the old faces--not just M, and SPECTRE, but also secondary characters like Bill Tanner. The story opens in Hungary, with Bond checking up on a resistance hero who was supposedly buried alive by his comrades for feeding information to the Russians. Even the eventual focus of the strip is surprisingly Fleming-like -- no atom bomb aimed at New York, but a Hungarian treasure stolen by the Mafia. The strip is first and foremost an adventure, but the draughtsmanship of Czech emigré Horak is right on the button so far as atmosphere goes, and, apart from the rare and enjoyable attention to detail, the story gives a few brief glimpses of the insecure world inhabited by reluctant denizens of communist regimes. The characters are by no means heroic partisans... just pathetic sketches of something we'd rather forget.

American TV's answer to Bond was THE MAN FROM UNCLE, created by Sam Rolfe (with input from Ian Fleming); it managed to skirt around politics by dubbing the antagonists with officious acronyms. U.N.C.L.E. were the cops, T.H.R.U.S.H. the robbers. The show was basically a violent escapade, and a product of its time.

So thrilling was UNCLE that it inspired SHIELD, created for Marvel Comics by Stan Lee. Since UNCLE was the subject of a surprisingly competent Gold Key comic (with art by Mike Sekowsky and Al McWilliams), SHIELD couldn't be too faithful to its origins. Although the same A.A.C.D. (Acronyms Against Controversy Device) was used, SHIELD centred on an existing Marvel property, Nick Fury. With the "old three-striper at heart" crashing through the

streets like a super-commando, the strip soon lost its connection with espionage; SHIELD soon became a staple part of comic-book continuity, the Marvel version of the heroic army unit that's called in to get smashed flat by the giant monster before our hero discovers its Achilles heel.

This makes all the more curious a Mike Friedrich tale called "Red-Eyed Jack Is Wild", introducing The Huntress, which appeared in MARVEL SUPER ACTION #1. Admittedly adventurous in concept, it was written soon after a minor writer of spy novels called E. Howard Hunt was caught researching one of his less plausible works at the Watergate.

Basically, it assumes that the Global Defence Network has become a front for American expansionism. The story opens at a Congressional Investigation of SHIELD's "covert political and military actions in Latin America." Of course, Fury has no knowledge of all this, and a character pops up like the fairy godmother to exonerate him, telling us that Fury "places action ahead of administration". (While this may sound implausible, there is a precedent. Apparently, Bill Donovan of the OSS was just as blasé about the conduct of his subordinates.)

Though an unqualified failure, Marvel's Huntress did pave the way for MASTER OF KUNG FU.

Originally intended as a Fu Manchu comic, the title was updated, due to the then prevalent Kung Fu craze. After an origin based upon events depicted in Sax Rohmer's novel "Emperor Fu Manchu", the comic floundered along for a while before writer Doug Moench dropped the David Carradine-influenced stories, and introduced MI6.

The series' new format is basically Sax Rohmer's. A young man, Shang-Chi, falls in love with a beautiful chinese hysteric (Leiko Wu). He is inveigled into a crusade against Fu Manchu by Sir Denis Nayland Smith, and his man Black Jack Tarr.

In his favour, Moench can handle English dialogue quite well, has a fine touch in character delineation (Shang-Chi is a real snot), and when teamed with Paul Gulacy produced one of the best spy sagas in American comics. Unlike most secret agents, Moench's characters were shown to have lives of their own, which could not be sublimated for the sake of the mission.

Unfortunately, the book is primarily about Kung Fu. This, to the uninitiated, consists of equal doses of pacifist philosophy and kicking people's teeth out. Since Gulacy left, the strip has been visited by a steady procession of undeveloped artists who have, apparently, had an effect on the script quality. And in between fighting and talking about how much he really hates fighting (which is valid, because Shang-Chi has long been established as a self-obsessed, hypocritical prig), Chi has become increasingly disenchanted with corruption within DI6.

Both this sub-plot and the Huntress story share a common fault. They make a pretence at "relevance" while actually differing very little from UNCLE. They're following a popular trend: public disillusionment with secret services. Shang-Chi in particular owes as much to Le Carré as Solo owes to Fleming. But whereas UNCLE was blatant cops and robbers, the two "disillusioned" strips dally with reality.

And, just like UNCLE, but with less justification (because they are less surreal), the two strips are presented without contradiction. There is never any voice which says, "This so-called corruption is justified". There is never a Burnside or even a Bond to say, "You may despise it, but I'm committed to it!" When Shang-Chi rails against Nayland Smith,

the man who's seen it all, from Burma to Scotland Yard to DI6, is dumbfounded. He stands there with his jaw flapping like the fat corporate bully from some Frank Capra movie, and eventually decides to throw in his job as Operations Director.

I should add that I'm not trying to do a David Gerrold, and I like Shang-Chi the way it stands. Moench and Friedrich wrote their strips the way they thought best, and you can't argue with that. Sadly for Marvel, American big business can screw the balls off Latin America without any help from Nick Fury; the Huntress had as much effect as a gnat against a battleship.

Perhaps things were simpler in wartime. I've already mentioned the O.S.S., and DC has produced a strip of that title. It does little credit to the real operation --which is surprising, since the O.S.S. was basically a "Sgt Fury" type operation. President Roosevelt asked Bill Donovan to set up the OSS for obvious reasons (the prewar staff of US Army Intelligence is rumoured to have numbered 18, one of whom spoke a foreign language). Donovan did his best, bringing together a network of cowboys and academics who inflicted massive damage on the enemy and themselves. Donovan often hired communists, because he wanted free-thinking, gung-ho operatives, and it was this "crime" which aroused the wrath of J. Edgar Hoover. Following the death of FDR after the war, his successor was advised by Hoover that the OSS megalomaniacs should be disbanded before they could get their authoritarian hooks into peacetime America. The president agreed, made his "In peacetime "spy" is a dirty word" speech, and so cleared the way for a new benevolent regime.

Since the O.S.S. strip is normally a back-up 'filler' in G.I. COMBAT, the plots are, of necessity, brief. Though exploiting the OSS's fascination with things unusual, the strip's only comment as such is the strain on "Control", who must send his agents to their death. Laudable sentiments perhaps, but they're delivered without conviction, merely dressing for routine adventures.

Unashamedly gung-ho is the Bob Haney-scripted UNKNOWN SOLDIER, a creation of the Kubert/Kanigher "Make War No More" days, when DC war comics were worth regular reading. Though his metamorphosis into a star has generally robbed the strip of its casual irony, the everyday story of a G2 agent whose face has been blown off can still merit perusal. In among the heroics, there are stories like #236's "An Honorable Betrayal", where the Soldier's ability to disguise himself brings him into painful contact with the men he must kill. At least, the Soldier has some philosophy: "Any effort that brings this insanity to an end is honor!"

A British version of this disguise ability is VICTOR's "Steelhead Sam", the everyday story of a DI6 agent whose face is blown off and replaced by a steel mask, upon which disguises can be applied. A combination of Unknown Soldier and IPC's Dredger, the strip is distinguished by the air of authenticity lent by Denis McCloughlin's (Boardman "Buffalo Bill Annuals") brooding artwork.

But, what of the Sandbaggers. Has there ever been a comic to rival them? Well, perhaps. It was in 1966 in the pages of a digest called SPIES ANONYMOUS TO ALL NATIONS that I discovered "White Heat".

It opens in Marseilles, as a Banana boat arrives from French Guiana. The lumpers intend to unload the cargo, but are put off by the discovery of several dead rats. The foreman angrily tries to show them there is nothing to be afraid of, and is startled by a dead negro. There are others in the hold, dead or dying of radiation sickness.

Two French agents are despatched to Cayenne, capital of French Guiana. They're crack shots, and agile, but by no means supermen. The anonymous writer manages to establish unobtrusively a rapport between the two men and the reader, and it's quite a poignant moment when one of the agents is wheeled out to his death in the White Heat chamber.

The villains are white settlers; their motivation quite familiar, especially since British Guiana was undergoing decolonisation in 1966, following years of violence: "No doubt you've heard that one day soon, the colony will receive its independence...our land and property will be confiscated...everything that we have worked for...will vanish! We shall become servants of a nigger parliament!"

The plan to eliminate the predominant black population is thwarted, as the surviving agent frees the captives of the two ringleaders, who then give the bad guys a taste of their own medicine. The final symbolic frame shows a tricolour floating above a bonfire, upon which the natives are hurling books while their brothers go on a rampage.

"These people won't rest," thinks the surviving agent, "until the flag of France has been torn down and trampled in the dust...forever."

As a matter of fact, the tricolour still hovers above French Guiana, though that's no reason to denigrate "White Heat". They made an attempt to extrapolate from an existing situation, which is rare enough even in an SF comic, and they backed it up with the solid story qualities so often ignored by spy comics.

I hope we'll see something to rival the quality of "White Heat" before too long, and I hope it will come from Britain. After all, we've more experience in cloak and dagger business. As the Duchess of Orleans once said, "Islanders are always more treacherous than inhabitants of terra firma".

-GRAEME BASSETT

# Howard P. Siegel:
## THE VIEW FROM AMERICA

Perhaps the most unfashionable specialty in today's fandom milieu is the function of the comic book historian. Plagued by a current group of collectors whose interests do not go beyond the late sixties, said historian's knowledge and collection cannot be appreciated or utilized. With only two major American publishers extant, a reader has little choice. He's either Marvel orientated (or should I say "propagandarized"), or he adhers to the solemnity of DC. The latter in recent years has been inclined to follow the Marvel format, however, so for all intents & purposes they offer the same mediocrity.

Comic collecting, and its more serious by-product, panelology, is at best a transient thing. Originally, the audience was mainly in its teens. But teenagers grow up, acquire new interests & responsibilities, and soon find themselves either no longer interested in the costumed characters, or have new scholastic and business careers which are more important. As each new cycle comes to the fore, the comic books of their predecessors' time lose glamour. It's no wonder that any article on the "Silver Age", the "Golden Age", or even the pre-Fantastic Four era attracts very few plaudits.

It also becomes exceedingly difficult to write with originality, when one's area is limited to less than 100 titles from but two publishers. In 1952 there were over 500 different titles being published. During 1966-67, the so-called "Batman TV Era", a resurgence took place. Existing companies, such as Charlton, Harvey, and Dell expanded their super-hero lines. New companies like Tower, Milson and M.F. Enterprises joined the bandwagon. Although the tenure of all was short-lived, the reader had a plethora of characters and titles at his disposal; and fanzines gained a flood of themes to discuss and criticize. The writers of my day were able to send their editors 6 to 10 pages of interesting material every month, without difficulty. For us it was a veritable heyday!

Then came a mixed blessing, in the person of Robert Overstreet. His Price Guide, while categorizing the output of the industry from its inception, had turned the vast audience into self-proclaimed entrepreneurs. Profiteering was the goal, buying and selling the method, and economy rather than art and enjoyment became the function of comic books. Fandom lost some of its best talent to the pros. Their replacements spent too much effort in philosophizing and creating cult heroes in the persons of Jack Kirby, Frank Frazetta, and Neal Adams. The themes most common were the social relevance of a script, or pondering the future of a particular character under a new editor. Few readers reacted to a well-researched piece about multi-award-winning Adam Strange, or the final days of the Justice Society. Marvelites issued a barrage of complaints when one of my contemporaries wrote a feature article proving that Stan Lee was an expert literary robber, and listed all the World War II superheroes whose names and powers he appropriated.

Who then is at fault? No one single group can be totally blamed. Economics have limited, or rather strapped, publishers. The once large, legible four, five or six panel page has given way to seven or eight highly indistinguishable boxes. Good art is hard to appreciate when it is reduced to microscopic proportions, and becomes a mass of cluttered space with conflicting colours. Former headline stars are now back page filler occupants, with no guarantee that they will have a decent tenure. Favourites are shifted from one title to another at DC, as are assignments. Reader loyalty is thus difficult to maintain. Marvel is under the impression that the "Golden Age of Marvel" will continue ad infinitum, and that any format change is unnecessary. Eleven pages of battle, good guys becoming bad ones, reprints galore, and the inevitable hero's hang-ups clutter each title every month. One does not need a crystal ball to know that Odin's castigation of Thor is an annual event; that Spider-Man will go through six more girl-friends in the next 8 years; and that the Thing and the Hulk will battle each other in crossovers every six months.

Fanzine editors should be taken to task, especially those publishing articles zines. Recently, a once-respected fanzine put into the mails a slickly-done issue which cover-featured the cultish film "The Rocky Horror Picture Show". It also included a guide to drawing naked women, a short commentary on pulp magazines, & diluted regular columns.

What next? Well, we've been through several "ages", periods of great activity, and bottoming out. The trial and error period still exists. We can expect some super-organization from Earth-VI, Johnny Romita III doing backgrounds for Marvel, a third Daredevil, and a new group of readers discovering Aquaman. All this in 25 pages for a dollar! Great Britain will still be subservient to American products, which is an unfortunate prediction. One would hope that another Dan Dare, Trigan Empire or Garth might come along and show American fans that creative genius is not a monopoly of the USA. The same might be said for the best of other countries, such as France, Australia, Spain, & Italy. I have seen some marvellous material from these nations, with carefully-done art that challenges the finest we have today. If such as this was today's product, fandom would be much better off. So would those of us who chronicle it all.

In my second or third article for Bem, I recounted the rise and subsequent erosion of the American Comic Art Convention system. For those readers who believe that such decay can repair itself, an update is in order. I have selected an article from the Los Angeles Times for January 4th 1981 as proof that the "state of the art" has gotten out of hand. The remarks in parenthesis are my own.

"The funnies these days are not necessarily a laughing matter. That's what comic book fans discovered at a Los Angeles convention, when one Batman magazine was selling for $2200, and a painting of Donald Duck paraded for $28,000. The pickings were plentiful. Hundreds of thousands of comic books, as well as baseball cards, movie snapshots and film paraphernalia including scripts, posters, soundtracks, buttons and car bumper stickers. (Note, therefore, that the comic art convention, once a symposium for panelologists and pure breeds, has evolved into a common market for anything and everything that can cultivate money for merchants whose interests are hardly theme oriented.) For $4 apiece you could buy a picture of Sophia Loren without clothes or Robert Redford with clothes, as well as myriad other stars in various poses.

Then there was merchant ___, a prosperous 65 year old tax consultant who finds himself in need of a tax deduction and has found one in his part-time business of selling "all kinds of junk". His merchandise -- sci-fi soundtracks and Rocky Horror material-- usually occupies two bedrooms, a garage and bathroom in his home. Dressed to get a little attention, he wore green & plaid pants, a T-shirt with a morass of buttons pinned across his belly, and an antenna with blinking red lights reaching above his head. (No doubt the elephants and clowns followed.)

At another booth was ___, associate pastor of the Trinity Baptist Church in Santa Barbara, who was spreading good cheer -- in the course of trying to make a profit. He had three Donald Duck paintings on sale from $7500 to $28,000. He said he bought them "a couple of years ago for a couple thousand". (I wonder if this erudite clergyman intended to donate his profits to the church? His first sale will have the revenue agents at his door reminding him about filling out excess profits or capital gains forms with his 1981 income tax report.) Pastor ___ acknowledged that the price might seem high.

A $2200 price tag dangled from a Batman comic book (Batman #1, Spring 1940) for sale by a Santa Monica dealer, who sheepishly admitted having bought the magazine from a little boy for $200. "He came into my store and said that he had this comic book that belonged to his father, and I gave him $100. Then my conscience bothered me, so I called him up and gave him another $100. The book is valuable because it is the first magazine devoted to the adventures of the popular cartoon character, Batman". (Cartoon character? This robber baron knows less about his wares than he does about fair dealings with children.)

Meet ___, the self-proclaimed "King of Schlock" with his one million comic books. He brought just 6000 of them to the convention along with an assortment of movie snapshots." (Just 6000 out of a million? Could the remaining 3500 cubic feet of comic be something of an over-calculation?)"

There you have it. A newspaper article typically reporting on the sights and the meaning of a comic art convention. What a perfect plot for a Rod Serling "Twilight Zone" story, if this piece could be sent back in time to fall onto the table of the committee meeting to form one of the first Comic Art Conventions in the mid 'sixties. Would these purists, these pioneers, these do-gooders have disbanded rather than plant the seeds that have led to things current?

If I were to run an American Comic Art Convention today, I would set down the following rules:

1) Dealers may not display or use the Overstreet Price Guide.

2) Pro Guests of Honour may not include those who have made a second career (and source of income) out of these conventions. They bring the same rote and pronouncements to each succeeding show, adding nothing but self-glory.

3) Panel discussions shall include retired pros, and some of the fan pioneers of past years.

4) Non-related merchandise, such as movie material, miscellaneous toys and games etc, may not be displayed or sold.

5) Old serials and similar movies may not be shown after midnight. Both fans and committee members need their sleep -- there is nothing more depressing than to see half awake, somewhat incoherent people straggling through the rooms and aisles.

6) Themes for the convention shall be realistic, and certainly not dictated by the publishers. It is implausible to celebrate Batman's 40th anniversary in his 41st year!

If it would do any good to try to clean up this act, I'd send Kathleen Glancy around the country with carte blanche to do her ethical thing.

-HOWARD P. SIEGEL

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SPACE: UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN THERE, YOU'LL NEVER REALISE HOW BIG IT IS.

BUT ON BOARD H.M.S. CONQUEROR, WE WERE BURNING THE MIDNIGHT OIL. WE WERE SEVEN DAYS OUT FROM THE FURBANK SYSTEM, AND ALREADY WE'D HIT A PROBLEM.

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HOLD ON, FRANK. I'M FEEDING EVERYTHING INTO THE COMPUTER.

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DAVE WHO?

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AND GET ME ONE TOO, FL'FF -- IT'S THE ONLY WAY I FIND OUT WHAT YOU LOT GET UP TO BEHIND MY BACK!

THUNDERMOLE HAS TO BE PUNISHED.

ALLOW ME

HELLO! THIS IS BLUE LAMP SPEAKING TO YOU IN ENGLISH

THIS IS THUNDERMOLE SPEAKING TO YOU IN EARNEST, COULD YOU COME ROUND AND SHOW OFF.

COULDN'T WE GO TO THE PICTURES INSTEAD.

THATS THE ONE

JUST THEN....

VISITORS?

IS VIC THERE

HELP!

WE REQUIRE NO HELP

GLOOP

I TOLD YOU WE SHOULD HAVE GONE TO THE PICTURES

EVERY TIME I SEE YOU, YOU'RE IN TROUBLE. WHY DON'T YOU GET A HOBBY

THIS IS MY HOBBY

AN ENTIRE GALAXY IS MY PLAYTHING AND STILL THIS MOLE THWARTS ME, THERE MUST BE A WAY TO OVERCOME HIM.

BAAAA.

BUT, USING HIS POWER RINGS, BLUE LAMP MOULDS THE MONSTERS.

# THUNDERMOLE

# unamerican activities

Having just returned from the first INTERNATIONAL COMIC STRIP & ILLUSTRATION FAIR in Barcelona, I am left with very little time to meet this deadline. Thus, once again, you will be subject to a rather short column.

All concerned seem to feel that the fair mentioned above was a great success, and it is now slated as an annual event. This year's guests included Neal Adams, Enric Bilal, Will Eisner, Jean Giraud, Gilbert Shelton and Richard Corben -- all under one roof. A good selection of European publishers also operated stands, & America's HEAVY METAL gave slide previews of their first movie--due out now on August 7th.

Back in England, KNOCKABOUT COMICS are due to publish their second issue, with work by Bryan Talbot, Hunt Emerson, Szostek, and other British artists. Bryan Talbot also has BRAINSTORM: THE EXHIBITION taking place at the Harris Museum, Preston, Lancs, from 5th September to 3rd October. ADAM ANT TRIBAL ROCK SPECIAL contains a new rock vision by Bryan, and his other graphics are appearing in such diverse places as FLEXIPOP and CUE WORLD.

On the sexploitation front, the fifth issue of TORRID has been published at last (better than the first few) @ £1.40, and Antonio Ghura has issued SUZIE & JONNIE--a Harold Hedd-style hippie adventure, together with back-up strips.

UNDIGESTED HORROR is a messy 20-page duplicated stripzine which features various would-be artists. It costs 30p, inclusive of death tax.

STICKY THIGH COMICS number one costs 25p, has 16 pages, and contains some very fine artwork and stories by Martin Longley.

TWO DECADES OF COMICS (see Fan-Things for ordering details) is a general summary of all the major pulp comic titles, and has a Brian Bolland cover plus a lot of information. Although its subject is too mainstream for my liking, it's a worthy effort and should appeal to many of you.

ANDROMEDA costs £1.50 from Only-women Press.

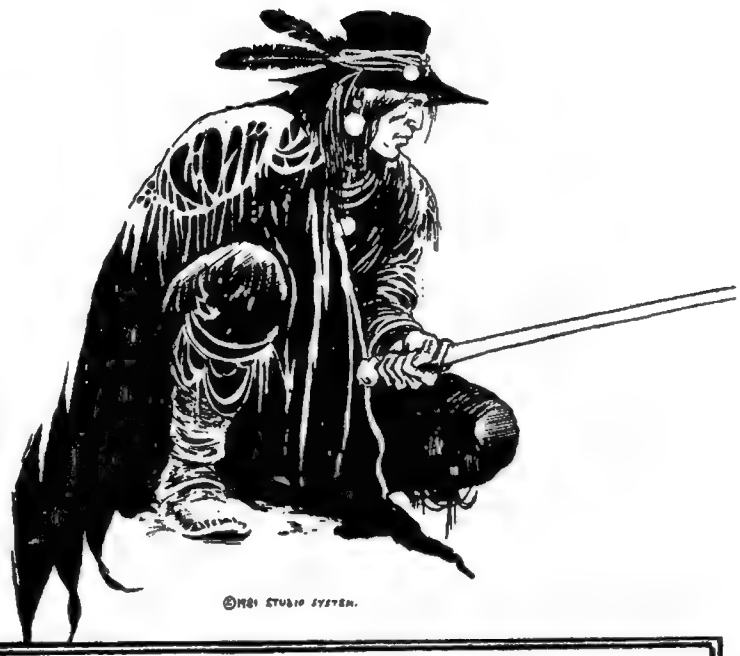
This is a fantasy novelette in strip form by Valerie Charlton, based on an idea and script by Pamela Copp. It's well above standard for this kind of thing, and deserves support. FAN (Feminist Arts News) ≠3 is a special comics issue. It costs 60p

and is a very interesting read. GOD CRAZY is a bizarre graphic composition for 40p from Better Badges.

DC SUPERHEROES MONTHLY ≠9 has the Bob Wakelin cover mentioned last time. ≠8 had Alan Craddock's "Flash" piece. Look for Craddock's "Huntress" on ≠10, and Bryan Talbot's "Hawkman" on ≠11. The annual, out in August, boasts Craddock's rendition of just about all the heroes you can think of.

Finally, the first two albums of Don Lawrence's STORM adventures (each 48 pages in full colour) are now due out here in the autumn, when both a monthly and weekly new comic for adults are also slated to start. -MAL BURNS

To the right is a character sketch of an ethnic hero being developed by Dez Skinn and his Studio System colleagues. The name of the character, the artist, and where he'll appear Dez won't tell!





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ART CREDITS ... BEM ≠34

Leigh Baulch: 34, 35; Brian Bolland: 1; Laurence Bowkett: 12; Alan Craddock: 15; Mark Farmer: 13; George Galbraith: 23; Dave Harwood: 17-21, 37; Kev Hopgood: 16; Mark Leigh: 32; Jimmy Marshall: 31; B. J. Martin: 10 (strip); Steven Martin: 27; Terry M. Moore: 38; Kurt Schaffenberger: 11; Dave Sim: 8, 10 (top--pencils from story in SWORDS OF CEREBUS ≠2), and Cerebus figure on front cover; Superswipe: 9, 43; Don Wazejewski: 25; Dean Willetts: 41; Colin Wilson: 2; David M. Windett: 36.

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---oooOOOooo---

# Fan-Things

Sad news: the third issue of STARLIGHT is to be the last, editor Max O'Connor tells me in a letter which accompanied my copy. "The reason for this is partly financial," he says "...but the main reason is that my work is definitely suffering. I'm at technical college now, and I'm at a very important stage in life, so I can't afford to foul things up."

STARLIGHT ≠3 40p post free, Max says now, for 24 A4 pages from Max O'Connor,

has an excellent red-yellow-and-black cover by Don Wazejewski, who also contributes a 3-page "to be continued" sf strip (where, I wonder?) and four more striking illoes; other art is by Ed Hillyer, Ian Wieczorek, Nick Neocleous, Dave Hornsby, Nigel Kitching, Dave Byrom, & Lilian Edwards (what a multi-talented lady!), while Graeme Bassett reports on a visit to meet Nick Fury, Ian Abrahams criticizes comics for the attempt to combine art and words, Martin Skidmore analyzes Marvel's "Silver Dagger" stories, Steve Jones praises Bill Mantlo's most ingenious "Paradox"...and there are some interesting reviews, columns and letters. It was a very promising issue, which makes Max's decision all the more disappointing. Is the moral that a would-be editor should think long and hard before he starts any fanzine, or at least any ambitious one? To go from sky-rocket to burnt stick in three issues is worse than useless, I'm afraid, and makes the launching of similar-appearing projects in future more difficult. But a good issue! Sigh...

A letter from Clive Glentworth,

he has a column in CASCADE, the relatively regular American underground comix magazine, and he wants to write about British and Continental comix and fanzines which would be of interest to Cascade readers. So, if you've got something you want Clive to review, send him a copy if you can, or at any rate let him know the title, cover price, the cost to Stateside buyers (including postage), print run--and the address to order from, of course. Sounds a good idea to me.

TWO DECADES OF COMICS: A REVIEW is in most comics shops now, with 112 A5 pages plus cover for £1 plus 35p post & packing, from Frank Plowright,

the cover's by Brian Bolland, repeated on the back without lettering. Inside you'll find brief descriptions of over 350 different comics series, with dates, some art details, and recommended issues -- no prices. No black & whites, colour magazines, or digests are included. "The bulk of the Marvel & DC output has been included, but the spectrum of titles from other companies has been restricted to a selective choice of material. Although some of the comics have been in production since the 1930's, the reviews only apply to issues published between November 1961 and March 1981 inclusive."

It's easy to quibble about what should or should not be included. Every Atlas/Seaboard comic this side of VICKI is listed--only four Gold Key titles are in, so you'll find no mention of their 61 issues of STAR TREK, or DAGAR, TUROK, MIGHTY SAMSON, DR SPEKTOR, BUCK ROGERS, SPACE FAMILY ROBINSON, or BROTHERS OF THE SPEAR. There's no room for funny comics, even Marvel's ARRGH! and SPOOF, though NOT BRAND ECHH gets in. The main DC mystery books are in, but not the ones that started life with a "gothic" influence (FORBIDDEN TALES OF DARK MANSION, previously DARK MANSION OF FORBIDDEN LOVE (!), and SECRETS OF SINISTER HOUSE, previously SINISTER HOUSE OF SECRET LOVE) -- and the Charlton mystery line, even MIDNIGHT TALES and BARON WEIRWULF'S HAUNTED LIBRARY, is ignored. Since many one-issue DC reprints are carefully described, the omission of FROM BEYOND THE UNKNOWN must be an error somewhere along the line, along with the DC SPECIAL SERIES and SUPER DC GIANT--but it must be deliberate policy that leaves out the Red Circle SORCERY, Charlton's SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN, EMERGENCY, BIONIC WOMAN, SPACE ADVENTURES, THUNDERBOLT, and SON OF VULCAN, Skywald's JUNGLE ADVENTURES and SUNDANCE KID, Tower's UNDERSEA AGENT... and how about Dell?

The score is: DC 149 series, Marvel 146, Atlas 22, Charlton 15, Archie/Radio/Red Circle/Mighty 5, Gold Key 4, Tower 3, Harvey 3 (including a general look at their "thriller" line), and Western, Comely, Skywald, Dell, and ACG one each. At the back of the book is a partial listing of the 1976-79 Eagle Awards results, listings by the five commentators of their own favourite comics... and there are 20 full-page illustrations by assorted fan artists. But I would gladly sacrifice 5 of 'em for more details on the "lesser known" companies. However...

A very useful book for every comics fan, old or new, with a vast quantity of information intelligently presented. I'll keep my copy next to the Alan Austin Price Guide!

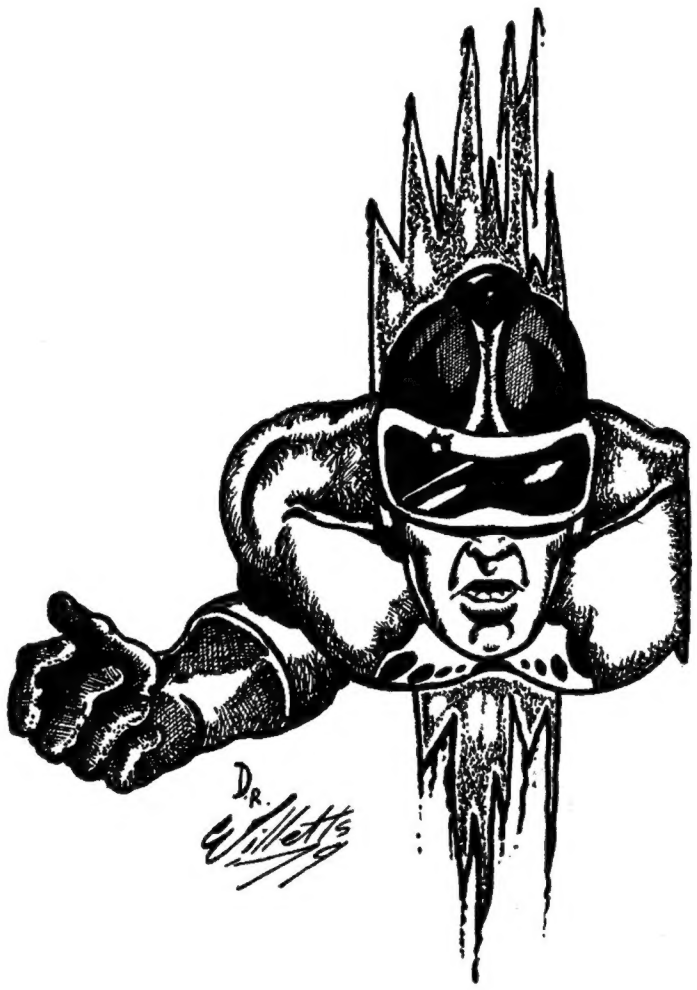
COMIC FORUM ≠9 has in its 60 A4 pages news, many pages of reviews, a profile of Guido Crepax, features on Donald Duck and Flash Gordon, and more--if you have oS42 or DM6, send it to editor Wolfgang Alber.

It may all be in German (or in Austrian, even), but it's an interesting browse. Did you realise that the Charlier and Giraud "Lieutenant Blueberry" series of albums, stalled at ≠4 in Britain, has now reached ≠40? "Lucky Luke", now by Morris & 'Vicq' (Antoine Raymond) has got to ≠27; other familiar names here are Romero's "Axa", Will Eisner's "Spirit", and the Goodwin/Williamson adaptation of the second "Krieg der Sterne" movie, "Das Imperium Schlägt Zurück". This is apparently Austria's best comics magazine, and it looks it; no doubt an international reply coupon sent to the editor would get you details on how to subscribe.

Moving a little closer to the white cliffs of Dover, Jean-Daniel Brèque tells me that a new 'Baragrin' book is due out very soon. It will contain all-new material (in French); for price details, apply to Francis Valéry.
France. French-reading COMICS UNLIMITED readers should need no further urging; they hope to reprint the comic that Fantasy Unlimited published a few years ago as well, translated into French, once they can reclaim the originals.

OGRE ≠8 25p for 28 A5 pages from Colin Gould,

came out on time. A solid 13 pages are devoted to letters, mainly by the usual names such as Taylor, Russell, Harwood, James, Bassett & Edwards; Phil Hall of 'Media' fame announces His marriage to Sara, to which Colin responds by sending to her his hearty condolences. In the front half is an article by Pete Scott, "In Search of Berni Wrightson Revisited" (have I got that right, Colin?), appreciations of Fred Hembeck and Leo Baxendale's "Willy the Kid" by Luke Rainford, and a movie-inspired look at the early Popeye strips by C. Gould. Add zine reviews, 2 pages of comics for sale, an editorial, and a page entitled "Chatterboxes", in which Colin quietly burbles away to himself, and there you have it; not much art this time, dominated by Alan Davis (in his Marvel style, unfortunately -- his fantasy-orientated art is fine, but any effort to bend it into the Marvel manner is, to me anyway, grating), but plenty of good stuff in a neat package. Colin cares about fandom & fanzines, and this is reflected in OGRE; I recommend it, it's certainly among Britain's "top five" these days.




MASTERS OF INFINITY ≠7 24 A4 pages for 40p, from Mike Taylor, came out just too late for review last time, although it did precede Bem-33 by about a fortnight; this is the zine that rivals Bem for slickness and interest, and certainly beats it for quality of printing, and if you haven't sampled it yet, please do! Despite the presence of "The Bem News Service", MoI has gained its own distinctive flavour; highlights this time are a Mike McMahon interview (plus colour cover), a report on Tyne & Wear council's travelling comic art exhibition, which recently visited Dudley Library, Kev F. Sutherland's sure-to-be-controversial "The Wednesday Column", and the new 4-page continuation of the saga of "Moonstone" by Mike Collins and Mark Farmer -- the last page of which, being the back cover, is in four colours! I approve of seeing fan-created superheroes in action, we see too few of them these days. So, a good fanzine; it could do with more pages, though. I mean, we'd gladly pay 60p for 36 pages, right?

FANZINE DIRECTORY ≠3, for 1977 60p or five international reply coupons for 14 8½" x 11" pages by post, from Allan Beatty,
is perhaps an acquired taste, being almost entirely a listing by name of all fanzines then extant. I hope it's more comprehensive in sf and fantasy, both here and abroad, than it is on the British comics fanzines --I'm sure I'd have noticed if we'd only had 7 titles going that year!

THE AUSTRALIAN COMIC COLLECTOR is in limbo; until someone's brave enough to take it over, its editor, Joseph Italiano, is holding things together by putting out THE AUSTRALIAN COMIC BUYERS GUIDE, a news/adzine. Issue 1 has 24 6½" x 8¼" pages; a 6-issue subscription costs A$3.60 if you're in Australia. If you're not in Australia, since there are other more local sources of news, you probably won't be tempted, unless you've got a zine of your own to trade.

TRIPLE ECHO ≠2 40p + 17p postage for 18 A4 pages from Steve Roberts,

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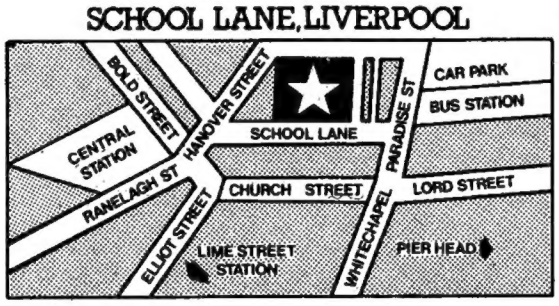


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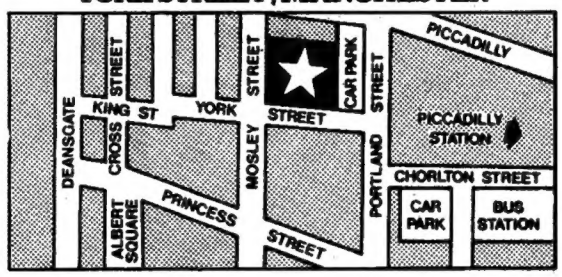


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has the large, friendly shape of Robby the Robot on the cover. It's an sf zine of a relatively informal kind, with short stories, an interview with unorthodox theatrical director Ken Campbell, and assorted media reviews, including quite a few UFO books, and Radio 4's "Earthsearch". It's not cheap for what it is--but what is, these days?

CEREBRO ≠12 36 A4 pages, plus 6-page X-INDEX on Nightcrawler, for 45p by post from G.F. Willmetts,

is as consistent as ever, and good solid reading for all X-Men fans. The X-Men Fan Club's up to 259 members now, and if you send Geoff £3 you could join them in time for the Club Outing on August 5th...to the Natural History & Science Museums in South Kensington. There's not a lot one can say about 'BRO; it's an authentic product of the Club, and always an enjoyable read for us mutant-boosters. We're lucky to have people like Geoff in fandom, people who do so much for so many with such enthusiasm; appreciate him.

Word from Gerald Midgley

has arrived: he's sorry for the delay, but THE ALTERNATIVE HEADMASTER'S BULLETIN ≠4 will be out around August. It will cost 50p (plus 20p post and packing) for the zine itself and a free stencil supplement, which sounds good to me. Lots of nice stripwork, I'm sure.

The news from Jonny Kurzman

isn't as good, though. The Marvel UK "Inside Comics" review of SUPER ADVENTURE STORIES ≠5 50p by post from M.J. Gibas,

although favourable, has only brought in "about 5" extra orders and, due to a shortage of money, they can't afford to print ≠6, which has been completed and features a 56-page Mike Gibas extravaganza. "Printing is cheaper in the States, so I might reprieve it next year when I return to school", Jonny concludes. Meanwhile, if you've not got SAS ≠5, featuring the duo's full-length Red Dragon story, look how well the strip did in the FanAc Awards...

THE OWL'S EFFORT ≠10 35p for 32 A6 pages from Richard Domar,

has a striking cover by Don Wazejewski, who also presents part one of "Orvil, the Owl Enforcer". There are 14 pages of letters from mainly the same names (Glancy, Gryc, Bassett, Scott, James...)--but nobody can accuse Dick of elitism, as he aims to print every letter he receives. Quite a few ads this time, including Dick's own lengthy & reasonable comics sales list.

QUEST ≠1 20 A4 pages for 35p + 15p postage from Neil Beesley,

is a very slick-looking, well-designed first issue -- which is logical, since co-editors Neil Beesley & Phil Jarvis are both very capable fan artists, whether working together or separately, and one of 'em does excellent title logos. You'll probably have seen their work in CEREBRO; and here they are with their own (hopefully) quarterly zine, with a little help from their friends. The text side is handled by Peter J. Poole (a Moon Knight article, plus a column, "Just Supposing..."), Maureen James (an informal analysis of the Ms Marvel series), Geoff Lamprey (whose column focuses on Ka-Zar), and John Gatehouse (who gives an entertaining report on his all-expenses-paid trip to London for the Superman II premiere, and runs a column on various topics, "Talking Points"); there is also a 6-page strip by Peter, Phil, and Neil, featuring an X-Men/LSH superteam that is copyrighted to Phil, set in a future society "that makes 1984 look like Disneyland". The elegant artwork seems a trifle cramped -- but when you are fitting 62 panels into 6 pages, that's hardly surprising. Establishing six heroes and a villain doesn't leave much room for background, but what there is seems intriguing -- it could be a very good series.

And it could be a very good fanzine. Don't wait for ≠2, act quickly, as only 200 copies were printed; I think it'll sell out, it deserves to.

CYGNUS ALPHA ≠4 24 A5 pages for 40p by post from Paul West,

has a striking cover by Ron Tiner, and inside you'll find work by Graham Bleathman, among others, plus the second half of an interview with David "K-9" Martin, a critique of Gerry Anderson's 1969 movie "Doppelganger" by Graeme Bassett, David Gryc on Blake's 7... plus the first (published) Judge Dredd story reviewed by Gary Henderson, a look at the TV version of "Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy", and assorted strips. All interesting, unpretentious stuff, which deserves your encouragement.

ALL IN THE FAMILY ≠1 65p by post for 30 A4 pages from Mo James,

is the first half of an epic sword & sorcery strip scripted by Mo and drawn by (co-creator) Ed Hillyer, featuring a brother and sister, Lonar and Mari--hence the title. Ed's not in the John Buscema league yet, but the art transmits the action okay, and the action comes thick and fast. I will reserve final judgement until I see volume two, but I'm impressed.

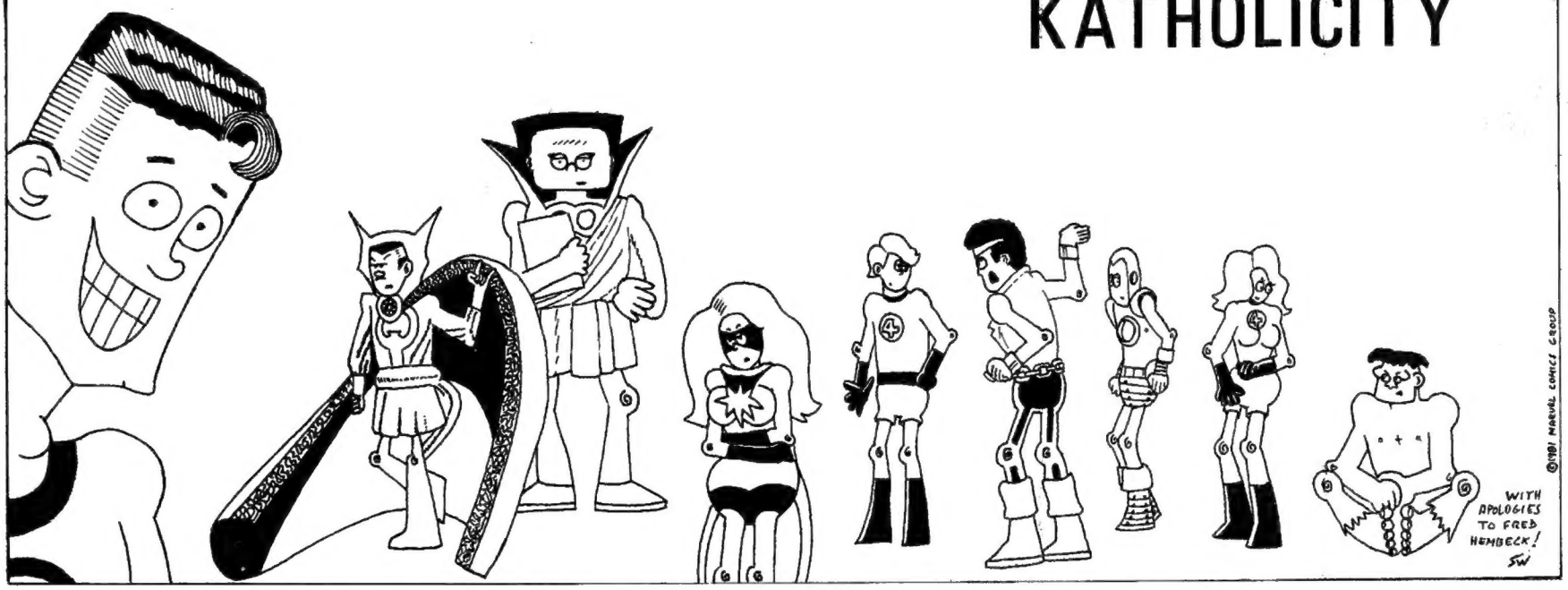
SPEAKEASY ≠17 18 A4 pages for 30p from Richard Ashford,

is the latest issue to hand; it's a special art issue, with, besides the current comics news, comic convention sketches by such worthies as Gulacy, Steranko, Staton, Chan, and Perez--some nice work, so this is a good time to investigate this long-running fanzine, if you haven't already done so.

SUPERNOVA ≠2 20 A5 pages for a 14p stamp from Simon Bostock,

is an improving sf zine, starring this time Steve Green on the "Project Starcast" set-up. Simon's setting up an sf apa, so contact him if you want to be involved, making your own 20 print-run zine for him to distribute to the other apa members. There is of course a successful comics apa in Britain too, whose members include Steve Green, K. Williams, and Les Chester; contact Mo James for more details. -ED SALLIS

# KATHOLICITY




SCENE: A HEMBECKIAN ANOMALY
DRAMATIS PERSONAE: THE MARVEL SUPERBEINGS
GUEST APPEARANCE: THE FLASH

Reed Richards: ...and so, while gathered in this Hembeckian Anomaly whose scientific principles I have briefly explained to you, we are enabled to discuss freely the malign influences from another world which are known in that world as the "Marvel Comics writers" and which are able to screw up all our lives. I can explain scientifically why they are able to do this...

All: No thank you. (or words to that effect)

Thing: We've only just woke up from your explaining the Hemwhoosis. Get on with it.

Reed Richards (sulkily): Oh, very well. If you're not interested in why our lives are screwed up, don't be. Before I report on the efforts of the scientific sub-committee to find a way of dealing with the problem, I will as usual throw open the meeting to those who have a particular grievance to air. Yes, Ka-Zar.

Ka-Zar: Yeah, uh, well, um--will you just listen to me? I sound as if I ought always to have a wad of chewing gum in my mouth. Heck, I'm supposed to be an Englishman, however expatriate. Gee, they change my speech patterns every outing. Y'know.

Shanna: And your love-life. I'm still trying to figure out how I wound up in the Savage Land.

Ka-Zar: At least you were a nice surprise. But finding out I was suddenly talking like a retarded delinquent when before that I was solemn and formal to the point of being Shakespearian, and before that I talked like Tarzan...

Tarzan: That you didn't. Let me inform you that I have always been both articulate and polyglot. It may be the case that in my first language, Ape, I spoke in few words. That was because Ape has few words. In English--et en Francais aussi, si vous me comprenez -- I have a perfectly adequate vocabulary and, contrary to popular belief, am capable of using the first person. Only when being impersonated on film by incompetent actors did I ever express myself the way you did when you started out.

Reed Richards: Lord Greystoke, as a very marginal member of this group, could you refrain from insulting the regulars?

Tarzan: I suppose the poor boy can't help it, any more than he can help the ignorance of his origin story writers about the workings of the peerage. At least old Burroughs did his homework. Anyway, I only dropped in for a moment. I have a much weirder crowd than this to see now.

Ka-Zar: Going to a dum-dum?

Tarzan: No, I have to address the House of Lords. On Conservation. Not that there aren't certain similarities. Au revoir! (he exits)

Black Panther: While you have our sympathy, Ka-Zar, just consider that you could be worse off. Look at what happened to Captain America and I. Not only were our lifestyles and speech patterns changed when the Kirby influence got us--God, how my speech patterns changed -- but we had to walk about for months with our feet never less than four feet apart. Thank God it didn't last long.

Ka-Zar: They've killed my best friend, too.

Whizzer: Huh! How would you like them to kill your wife...
(The Flash, vibrating between Earths I and II, briefly materializes...)

Flash: You should talk. (...and vanishes.)

Whizzer: Young whipper-snapper. As I was saying, kill your wife, Periodically revise the number of your children, and then forget all about you?

Thing: Speaking about your former kids, isn't Crystal due to drop yet, Quickie? She seems to have been pregnant a long time.

Sue Richards: So? I was pregnant a year. What in the name of--?
(A long procession of aged beings is materializing. They are covered in frost.)

Dr Strange: He's not here. Try the Dim Dimension.
(The beings vanish.)

Dr Strange: Sorry, Mrs Richards. Do go on.

Sue Richards: But what did they want?

Dr Strange: They were looking for Hoggoth.

Sue Richards: That explains everything, I'm sure. Anyway, as I was saying, I was pregnant for a year. You'd think I was an elephant.

Ms Marvel: Compared to what I had to put up with, you have nothing to grumble about, even if it was actually more than a year.

Sue Richards: It was just a year.

Ms Marvel: But you announced it in the summer of one year, and gave birth the summer of the next. You can't tell you're pregnant the morning after, unless you happen to be me, when you are 3 months gone the morning after.

Sue Richards: On the contrary, if your husband happens to have whipped up a "Morning After Pregnancy Diagnoser" in his spare time...

Reed Richards (hastily): Yes, well, let's not go into that just now. Are there any other complaints?

Black Bolt:

Professor X: You don't say!

Human Torch: Of course he doesn't say.

Professor X: She's been held prisoner, you say?

Black Bolt:

Professor X: For about two years? And you think they've simply forgotten about her?

Black Bolt:

Professor X: Well, I don't suppose it can be doing much for her sex-life, either.

Reed Richards: Perhaps I can hold out some hope. As you all know, I head the scientific sub-committee set up to find a way of blocking off the evil influences. We still haven't come up with a way of insulating our Earth from them--but we think it possible that in the very near future we will be able to build a dimensional transporter to take us to their Earth.
(Cheers and applause.)

Cyclops: You mean I can get them? The men who murdered my Jean? Shooter and Claremont, and probably Byrne too -- get them, and smash every bone in their bodies, and stamp on...

Wolverine: Easy, boss, easy. You can't just go about killing people. Calm down, now. What the hell are you all staring at?

Professor X: Incredible, isn't it? They've been going on like that ever since Cyclops found out who really killed Phoenix. I can only compare it to the drunk who can only be sobered by having to take care of the even drunker.

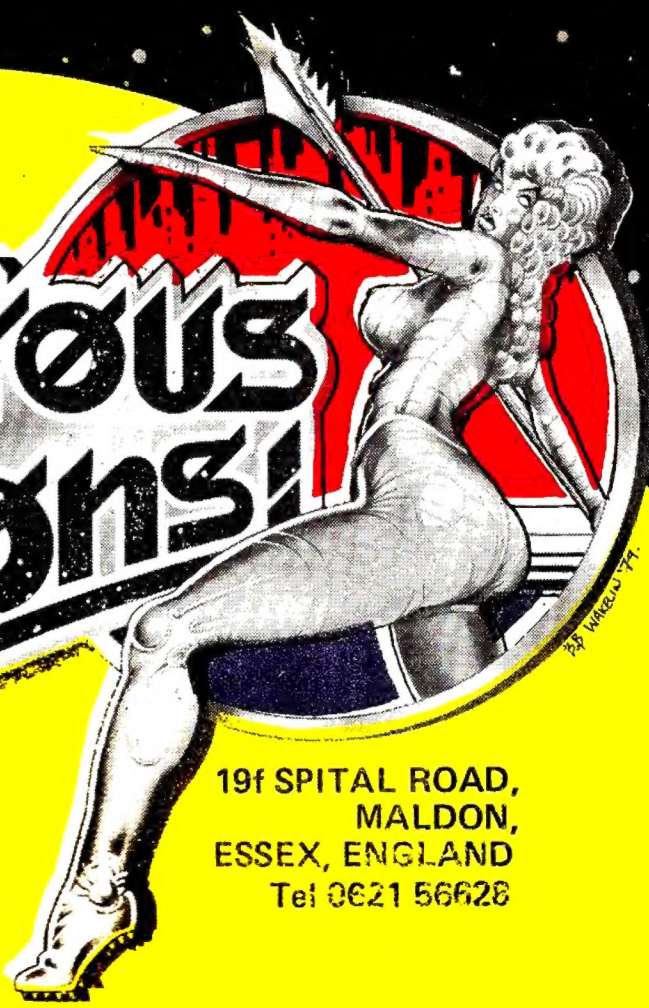
Reed Richards: Well, perhaps we won't resort to quite those extremes. But let the "Marvel Comics writers" tremble, because our time is coming fast.

Thing: And it's gonna be -- all together now...

All: Clobbering time!

-KATHLEEN GLANCY

# Dangerous Visions



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